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**MARIE STOPES'
SEXUAL REVOLUTION
AND THE BIRTH
CONTROL MOVEMENT**

Clare Debenham



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palgrave
macmillan

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ISBN 978-3-319-71663-3 ISBN 978-3-319-71664-0 (eBook)
<https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-71664-0>

Library of Congress Control Number: 2018932800

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Cover illustration: Mono Circles © John Rawsterne/patternhead.com

Printed on acid-free paper

This Palgrave Pivot imprint is published by Springer Nature
The registered company is Springer International Publishing AG
The registered company address is: Gewerbestrasse 11, 6330 Cham, Switzerland



Marie Stopes relaxing with her cat in 1914 (Marie Stopes International)

Dedicated to the memory of Harry Stopes-Roe, and to Mary Stopes-Roe.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I, like the other researchers and biographers of Marie Carmichael Stopes, owe a great debt of gratitude to Harry Stopes-Roe, the son of Marie, and his wife Dr Mary Stopes-Roe. As custodians they carefully preserved Marie's papers in their archive, and opened this for visiting academics. Moreover, the couple have put fellow researchers in touch with one another. Harry and Mary have been unfailingly generous with their time and their memories have made Marie seem ever present. Mary intends to carry on with her husband's work in tribute to him. Thanks also to Tomasz Hoskins who initially proposed this biography and aroused my interest in the subject. My grateful thanks for the co-operation of Marie Stopes International.

Major collections featuring Marie Stopes are now archived in the British Library and the Contemporary Medical Archives at the Wellcome Library, London. Many thanks for the patience of all the archivists in these specialist institutions including University College London and of my own institution, the University of Manchester.

The other researchers working on Marie Stopes and her family have been most generous in sharing their findings. These include Dr David Gelsthorpe, University of Manchester, Manchester Museum; Dr Lesley A Hall, Emeritus Archivist, Wellcome Library; Professor Richard Cleminson, University of Leeds; Dr Stephanie Green, Griffith University, Australia; Dr Carla Hustak, University of Toronto, Canada; Professor Pratik Chakrabarti, University of Manchester; Dr James Sumner, University of Manchester, Centre for the History of Science; Dr Francis Wenban-Smith, University of Southampton; Professor Greta Jones, University of Ulster.

The staff and volunteers of the Friends of Portland Island Museum (the museum founded by Marie) have been exceptionally helpful in allowing me access to Marie's correspondence and artefacts. They continue to celebrate Marie's birthday every year and sponsor informative talks on her. Fran and Les Lockyer at the Old Lighthouse Portland Bill, Dorset, where Marie spent family holidays, have also been generous with their time.

Amir Koosha and Koosha Productions have shown great patience in assisting me with modern technology.

My family, husband Ron Marsden, sons Richard and Ian, granddaughter Emily have all supported me and given encouragement. I am especially grateful to Ian whose gift provided a new line of enquiry.

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THE TIMELINE OF MARIE STOPES

1879	Charlotte Carmichael married Henry Stopes.
1880, 15 October	Marie Carmichael Stopes born to Charlotte Carmichael Stopes and Henry Stopes in Edinburgh.
1884, 13 March	Winifred (Winnie) born.
1885–92	The two girls were home tutored by their mother.
1892	The two girls became day pupils at St George's High School Edinburgh.
1894	The family moved to Hampstead. Marie and Winnie now attended North London Collegiate School.
1900	<u>Marie enrolled in the Science Department of University College London.</u>
1902	Marie graduated with a BSc, first class honours in two years instead of the normal three. Harry Stopes died.
1903	Marie entered <u>University of Munich</u> , Botanical Institute on a travelling scholarship. She met Japanese academic Professor Kenjiro Fujii and formed a deep relationship with him.
1904	<u>Awarded DSc from University of Munich.</u>
1904	Marie was appointed to <u>University of Manchester as a demonstrator. She was soon promoted to lecturer. Marie was awarded a DSc from the University of London, so becoming the youngest DSc in the country.</u> She then published scientific papers on palaeobotany.

1907–08	Marie's romantic relationship with Kenjiro Fujii ended. She still proceeded to search for fossil plants in Japan and was attached to Imperial University Tokyo.
1909	Marie left Manchester, citing health reasons, and moved to London, Hampstead with her sister Winnie.
1911	Marie visited Canada on a botanical expedition. While there she met and married the <u>Canadian biologist Reginald Ruggles Gates</u> with whom she lived on her return to England.
1912	Marie met <u>Aylmer Maude</u> and formed a platonic relationship with him.
1914	<u>Marie filed a marriage nullity petition against Gates.</u>
1916	<u>The marriage to Gates was annulled. Marie started to research and write <i>Married Love</i>.</u>
1918	<u>Marie married the businessman and pilot Humphrey Verdon Roe, her backer for <i>Married Love</i>. This successful book was immediately followed by <i>Wise Parenthood</i> and a succession of books on contraception and relationships</u>
1919	Marie gave birth to baby Henry who tragically did not survive.
1921, 17 March	<u>Marie and Humphrey opened Britain's first birth control clinic at Marlborough Rd, Holloway, London.</u>
1921, May	<i>Birth Control</i> —Queen's Hall Public Meeting.
1921, August	<u>Marie founded her co-ordinating organisation: Constructive Birth Control and Racial Progress (CBC).</u>
1923	<u>Her libel action against Dr Halliday Sutherland started.</u> Death of her younger sister Winnie.
1924, March	Marie gave birth to her son Harry Verdon Stopes-Roe.
1930	<u>Marie joined National Birth Control Council but left after two years.</u>
1938	onward Gradual deterioration of her relationship with her husband Humphrey Verdon Roe.
1948, July	Marriage of her son Harry Stopes-Roe to Mary Barnes Wallis.
1949, July	Death of Humphrey Verdon Roe.
1958, 2 October	<u>Death of Marie Carmichael Stopes from breast cancer.</u>

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CHAPTER 1

The Challenge of Marie Stopes

Abstract The main themes of the book are introduced in this chapter: Marie as an academic scientist, sexual revolutionary and birth control pioneer. It examines her fame in the inter-war years and continued controversy. The birth control movement is placed in the context of the suffrage. Existing biographies of Marie are reviewed and the new oral and documentary evidence is introduced. The importance of the role of the biographer is discussed and the author's qualifications for writing this book. Controversial topics are raised such as Marie's relationship with Eugenics. This chapter draws attention to the timeline at the start of the book and to the pen portraits of Marie's suffragette friends at its end.

Keywords Suffrage campaign • *Married Love* • Birth control movement • Palaeobotany • Qualifications of author

Marie Stopes may well prove to have been one of the most important and outstanding influences of the twentieth century – a judgement with which, one surely feels, she would have been in complete agreement. Margery Pyke, 1962 Family Planning Association¹

The year 2018 is the hundredth anniversary of the publication of Marie Carmichael Stopes' ground-breaking book on sexual relationships, *Married Love*, which was released on 26 March 1918, selling 750,000 copies by

1931. Its opening sentence of ‘Every heart desires a mate’ sets the lyrical tone for her sexually explicit advice and this language helps to explain its popularity.² *Married Love* is doubly important, for as well as resonating with the modernist mood of the age it gave impetus to Marie’s pioneering work for the birth control movement. The evidence agrees with the controversial statement at the chapter heading made by birth controller Margery Pyke shortly after Marie’s death in 1958. Margery believed that Marie was one of most influential women of the twentieth century but correctly acknowledged that Marie was a most complex personality.

This introductory chapter demonstrates how Marie was one of the most well-known figures in the inter-war years and traces the resurgence of interest in her work. Reference is made to the valuable existing studies of Marie and it is shown how this study has access to new revealing archival material and oral interviews. Themes are introduced which run throughout this book such as Marie’s modernism, her innovative work, her willingness to circumvent rules, her mixture of fact with fiction, and the scientific contradictions in Marie’s work. Controversial issues are raised such as Marie’s relationship with Eugenics. The organisation of the book is shown in the chapter outlines which are given in this introductory chapter. The timeline at the start of this book helps to place Marie’s actions in context, and the pen portraits at its end shed further light on the lives of her friends, many of whom had had been involved in the suffrage campaign.

As early as 1914, when still a comparatively young woman, Marie maps out the proposed stages of her life; ‘I planned to spend twenty years on scientific research, then twenty years on philosophy, and then twenty years in the direct service of humanity, meanwhile writing one poem to embody a lifetimes experience of the University and when the poem was finished ...to die.’³ She broadly fulfilled these ambitions in an age where women had to strive to succeed and when they had not yet been granted universal suffrage.⁴

When reviewing Marie’s legacy the sociologist Professor Laurie Taylor argues that she was an idealist who had quite fortuitously been handed the means for realising her ideals.⁵ The evidence from this book does not support his assertion of passivity, as Marie always chose her own destiny and the conflicts she fought. The relaxed portrait of Marie taken in 1914 with her favourite cat depicts a conventional gentle woman, but this research reveals a determined and, at times ruthless, pioneer.

Marie pursued a varied career in three separate but inter-connected areas: as academic scientist, a writer on sexual issues and a birth control pioneer.

For the first two decades of her working life Marie pursued a scientific career which later benefitted her sexually revolutionary and birth control campaigns. Her academic achievements encouraged detailed research methods, communication skills, organisational ability, confidence in pursuing an original path of reasoning and the courage to embark on novel course of action.

Marie's academic specialism was palaeobotany which was then a popular area of biology and which she explains in her books as studying the remains of the 'whole series of plants, mostly extinct, that have lived upon the earth through millions of years'.⁶ Marie, by circumventing the university rules, was awarded a brilliant first degree in the record time of two years at University College London. As a post-graduate student she was the first woman to be awarded a PhD at the University of Munich Botanical Institute. She then became the youngest Doctor of Science in England. She was extremely significant, setting the course for others, as the first woman science lecturer to be appointed to the University of Manchester. In her brilliant academic career Marie undertook research in Germany and later organised academic expeditions to Japan and Canada.

Marie's careers of sexual revolutionary and birth control pioneer were to follow these extraordinary achievements. At the age of 38 years when many people had a settled career, Marie turned away from academic life to begin a new career as sexual revolutionary. Personal circumstances, such as the break-up of her marriage to a fellow academic, led Marie to turn away from academia, and she began discussing sexual relationships in her book *Married Love*. The publicity of *Married Love*, together with appeals for help from its readers led to Marie organising a campaign for birth control. She then undertook the practical action in founding this country's first birth control clinic in a poor part of London. Her actions encouraged the foundation of other birth control clinics in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. The issue of birth control became Marie's most important legacy.

Birth control was a significant issue for politically active women in the 1970s and I was interested how this was adopted as a campaigning issue for women like Marie who lived in the early twentieth century. My work reveals that many of those involved in the fight for women's suffrage subsequently became involved with the birth control campaign. Mrs Cooke, writing in 1923, certainly connected these two campaigns, 'What does it avail a woman that she has the franchise if she cannot call her body her own.'⁷ This post-suffrage research led to my doctorate and a subsequently published book in which I came to recognise the work of Marie Stopes as having particular importance.⁸

The 1920s and 1930s have often been considered inauspicious times for feminism when contrasted with the drama of the suffrage movement but this view has been reassessed by academics such as Professor Pat Thane, King's College London.⁹ The campaigns for birth control led by Marie shed an important new light on inter-war feminist activity. In 2004, Hera Cooke rightly makes the point that 'Fertility change has largely remained the province of demographers whose interest is in population change. As a result arguments about the causes of shifts in fertility rates have attracted little critical attention from historians of women.'¹⁰ This book shows how Marie's campaign for birth control, involving other women activists and former suffragettes is particularly significant in the history of feminist activity.

The following research shows how Marie Stopes' messages on sexual matters were spread throughout Britain in all social classes and even to all ages. Her publications were extremely popular with the upper and middle classes who enthusiastically read her work. Marie's friend, the academic Mary Stocks, read *Married Love* as a young married woman and although she found the language too full of hyperbole for her taste she could recognise why it was so popular with her friends.¹¹ Former cabinet minister, and now member of the House of Lords, Shirley Williams explains in her autobiography *Climbing the Bookshelves* that her intention as a young child was to reach Marie's forbidden books which were on her father's top shelf.¹² Shirley was born in 1930 and her father was the political scientist George Catlin and her mother the pacifist feminist writer Vera Brittain whose best-selling *Testament of Youth* resonated with a post-World War I audience. Similarly, another female professional told me how her father, a psychiatrist who had a practice in Chelsea, purchased a copy of *Married Love* for his library.¹³ Mary Stopes-Roe's mother was so impressed by her reading of *Married Love* that she engineered an invitation to visit Marie who then lived nearby. Mary Stopes-Roe vividly described to me how this was to be her first glimpse of her future husband.¹⁴

Significantly Marie was not just concerned with attracting a middle-class audience but reached out to all social classes. She consciously made her books and articles deliberately accessible to working-class men and women. Robert Roberts in *The Classic Slum*, his account of life in the Lancashire industrial town of Salford, describes how Marie made a lasting impact on working-class life because manual workers could read Marie Stopes' birth control articles in cheap popular magazines such as *John Bull*.¹⁵ These were passed round by the men and women working in Salford's factories. Some of her books were intentionally cheap and like

her *Letter to Working Mothers* could be easily understood by men and women with little formal education.

Many academics are content to have their work just recognised in London and the Home Counties but Marie reached out to the whole country. Mrs Elsie Plant, married to a hat block maker, explained to me in a 1978 interview, how living in Stockport, Cheshire, she did not have Marie's postal address but was able to trace Marie through her press coverage.¹⁶ Under the auspices of the local Labour Party Fellowship she and her husband invited Marie to speak in the former World War One Armoury in Stockport. Marie accepted their invitation. When I researched the meeting in the archives of the local paper I had anticipated learning that a couple of hundred enthusiasts attended the meeting in a church hall. However, that month's *Stockport Express* reported that Marie's talk attracted an audience of nearly three thousand in the vast Armoury. Elsie Plant recalled that Marie was determined to carry out this speaking engagement against the wishes of her husband because Marie was then pregnant. Marie had previously lost one baby at birth.¹⁷ Ruth Hall published a letter from one woman who had enthusiastically attended this 'good and useful meeting' in Stockport and afterwards requested further technical information.¹⁸

Another northern working-class woman inspired by Marie was the redoubtable Bessie Braddock. In the 1920s Bessie was a young married woman who was later to be the future Labour MP for Liverpool Exchange and came to be later nicknamed 'Battling Bessie'. Millie Toole in her biography *Mrs Bessie Braddock MP* includes this account of Bessie's political activities:

Mrs Myers recalls her striding the streets in the mental company of Dr Marie Stopes and reading the doctor en route whilst most women were not at all sure she should be read privately; and she began one street corner meeting, composed mostly of men, with a recital of Dr Stopes' case for keeping the burdens of women within reasonable bounds.¹⁹

Liverpool had a high Roman Catholic population and her actions could have provoked the violent religious confrontations that later happened in Salford over the founding of a birth control clinic there which was sited opposite the Roman Catholic cathedral.

It was not just adults who knew Marie Stopes because her name percolated through to all age groups. In 1924 her name was enthusiastically chanted in London's playgrounds by school children in their skipping

rhymes. These catchy chants, identified by Ruth Hall, were most likely taken from popular music hall songs such as those Peter and Iona Opie in *Law and Language of Children* describe.²⁰

Jeannie, Jeannie full of hopes
Read a book by Marie Stopes
Now, to judge by her condition
She must have read the wrong edition.

Probably these school children had little idea of the meaning of the verse, but something that ‘is a bit rude’ is often attractive to young ones.

It was not just in Britain that Marie’s work attracted a large following as it also resonated with American readers. Marie had a complex relationship with the American birth controller Margaret Sanger. Margaret Sanger became a well-known figure, but Marie was also to become widely recognised in the United States. In 1921 Marie visited the United States giving a lecture to an invited audience.

Marie Stopes’ impact in the United States, as a sexual revolutionary, was similar to that which she made in Britain. Initially banned by the American authorities, for reasons of alleged obscenity, *Married Love*, could not be purchased in the United States until 1931, but this ruling gave the book extra publicity. Professor Maria Bucur, Indiana State University Bloomington, in *Gendering Modernism* makes the point that within four years of its availability a survey of American academics listed *Married Love* among the twenty-five most influential books published in the last fifty years, listing it even ahead of such notable works as Sigmund Freud’s *Interpretation of Dreams*.

Marie’s popularity peaked in the 1920s and 1930s, but then her reputation sank into relative obscurity after World War II and she was regarded as an anachronism being merely of historical interest, or according to academics, such as Professor Maria Bucur, reviled because of her alleged views on Eugenics. By the time of her death in 1958 Marie’s achievements were largely overlooked by the academic and popular press.

In the twenty-first century there has been a resurgence of interest in Marie’s life and work which is once again proving to be controversial. One event in particular illustrates Marie’s enduring fame and ensuing controversy. In 2008 Marie was honoured by being featured on a Royal Mail fifty pence postage stamp in its ‘Women of Distinction’ series, together with others including Millicent Fawcett, when female academics were asked to

select women who had made a major impact on women's lives in the past hundred years. A member of the selection panel explained to me how she believed that Marie's achievements in helping women control their fertility had a liberating effect on millions of women and so was worthy of the highest recognition. This stamp provoked strong feelings and there was opposition from the popular press, in particular the *Daily Mail*. This centred round Marie's supposed Eugenic views which are discussed more fully in a later chapter. One of the newspaper's readers even threatened to return any mail containing her portrait on its stamp. As recently as 5 June 2014, the *Daily Mail* marked the death of her ninety-year-old son Harry Stopes-Roe with the headline 'Monster of a mother'.²¹ Harry had a difficult relationship with his mother but he never condemned her in his writings or conversations with me and certainly did not regard Marie as a conventional Eugenicist.²²

Writing Marie's biography is not straightforward as she can be regarded as an enigma. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines enigma as 'an unsolved problem; baffling conjecture as to character, sentiments, identity or history' and the *Collins English Dictionary* terms enigma as 'an action or mode of action which cannot be satisfactorily explained'. These elements are to be found in Marie's historiography which is treated in this book as an unsolved problem. Part of the mystery was consciously created by Marie herself.

Marie was a prolific author and so it was surprising that she did not write her own autobiography. Marie claimed that she was always too busy to write this and instead carefully selected those who she entrusted to write her life. This omission is again part of her enigma and poses the key question of what the issues were that she did not want to discuss.

Marie's good friend Aylmer Maude wrote two biographies of her: *The Authorised Life of Marie C. Stopes* in 1924 and *Marie Stopes, Her Work and Play* in 1933. Although Aylmer was over twenty years older than her and married, she was obviously attracted to him and enjoyed a 'flirtatious friendship'. He even shared a house with Marie and her first husband, and was to give Marie away at the wedding of her second marriage. Marie admired his literary achievements as Aylmer was the biographer of the Russian author Tolstoy. However, at the start of his book Aylmer acknowledges, 'To write the life of a friend who is still very much alive, presents difficulties.'²³ Marie in all likelihood wanted to control the content of his writing.

Another friend, Keith Briant, published his biography after Marie's death in 1962. He had known Marie for over thirty years and claims he

had frequently tried to persuade her to write her own autobiography.²⁴ Marie had first met him 1938 when he was just down from Oxford where he had been editor of *Isis* and considered himself to be a poet. Keith was married, but Marie was often attracted to younger men. Briant also refers to the paradoxical character of his relationship with Marie and how he was unable to reveal certain details of her life. Perhaps by leaving the writing of her biography to others Marie could conceal issues that were inconvenient to her.

Since Marie's death there have been important biographies of her, including a sensitive study written by her son Harry Verdon -Stopes, which provides important personal details.²⁵ The biographies of Marie written by Ruth Hall and June Rose are exceptionally well researched.²⁶ Biographer Ruth Hall describes Marie's personal life as 'an anguished paradox' and this phrase perfectly encapsulates Marie's experience.²⁷ Particularly welcome is the later research of Professor Stephanie Green and Dr Lesley Hall.²⁸ Stephanie Green has written a sensitive and perceptive study of the mother and daughter relationship of Charlotte and Marie Stopes. Dr Hall, at the Wellcome Library, as well as researching Marie's correspondence and editing a collection of Marie's birth control literature, has written on Marie's courtroom drama and organised a thought-provoking exhibition of Marie's work at the Library.²⁹

As the most comprehensive biographies of Marie are over twenty-five to thirty years old this study has the advantage of being able to draw on recent research. This is particularly relevant in controversial areas such as Eugenics. Having access to Marie's specimens in the University of Manchester Museum has enabled me to concentrate more on Marie's academic life than earlier biographers. Moreover, the focus of interest in Marie's work has changed during the past decades and Marie's role as a feminist role model is being more fully explored than in earlier biographies. She is being seen as a modernist. The relationship of Marie's birth control campaign to the movement for female emancipation is a theme running throughout the book.

My research has been helped by the fact that Marie was rightly convinced her work was historically important. Unlike major twentieth-century figures, including her friends Eleanor Rathbone MP and Baroness Mary Stocks, who ordered their personal papers to be destroyed on their deaths, Marie gave instructions that documentation had to be removed from her house and preserved for posterity. A three-ton lorry removed her papers to the British Library where they are now archived in 324 vol-



Fig. 1.1 Image of Marie Stopes as used by Royal Mail

umes.³⁰ Thus it has been possible to consult a wide range of unpublished material and the family has just gifted more of Marie's papers to the British Library. There are other important archives of her papers, particularly that at the Wellcome Library.

There are a number of other significant archives where I have been able to consult other unpublished material. These include University College London which holds Marie's doctoral papers and the University of Manchester where she worked as a lecturer. The confidential BBC archives held at Caversham Park are particularly revealing and I have drawn on

them frequently.³¹ In addition Marie's family has kept palaeobotanical specimens and papers of special significance in its archive. The Women's Library @LSE holds a wide range of Marie's publications as does the Wellcome Library. The Portland Museum in Dorset, for which Marie campaigned and founded herself, has made available to me Marie's correspondence as well as an opportunity to view the specimens of which she was so proud.

During the past thirty years I have had the privilege of interviewing those who knew Marie well and could provide further insights into her complex character. Interviews with her son, Harry Stopes-Roe in 2009, and daughter-in-law, Mary Stopes-Roe have been especially valuable and used throughout this study.³² Mary, since the death of her husband, has continued to be especially supportive of this research. Women who knew Marie personally have contributed perceptive insights. Mrs Elsie Plant, originally interviewed by me in 1978, reflected on her many meetings with Marie in Stockport in the 1920s and significantly concluded, 'She was not a team player.'³³ In Aberdeen, birth control pioneer Fenella Paton was frequently visited by Marie. Fenella's son, David Paton, shared his memories of Marie's stay with them when she visited their Aberdeen birth control clinic.³⁴

Professor Stephen Hopwood has reflected that 'all engaged and engaged writing contains one's own biography as a subtext' and this is certainly true in this research.³⁵ I also soon discovered that this is true of this biography. We both lived in South Manchester with houses ten minutes away from one another, both held PhD's, both lectured at the University of Manchester, both became involved with women's politics, both kept our maiden names on marriage and both had tragic first pregnancies. This gives me some empathy with Marie, although obviously Marie's remarkable achievements are on a completely different plane to mine. Moreover, I have over the years, so immersed myself in Marie's popular books that I realise that I have, in certain instances, adopted the effusive literary style of her *Married Love*, rather than formal academic language when describing personal relationships.

There are a number of important themes that run through this research.

Marie's images and pioneering actions are in accord with the Modernism described as a break from the past, as in the recent by book Professor Maria Buer, *Gendering Modernism*.

Marie had the capacity to be innovative and change her course of action to suit her new discoveries. For instance, in her university application

Marie showed flexibility by swapping academic subjects. She found new ways to shorten the time taken for her degree. While working in Manchester, Marie took advantage of the surrounding environment to focus on her new research subject of coal balls. In her legal dealings with the breakdown of her marriage she pursued the obscure legal pathway of annulment. She also had the ability to recognise and seize new opportunities.

Marie could, chameleon-like, alter her appearance to suit her current role. One of Marie's iconic academic images shows her in her laboratory in the University of Manchester, hair tied back, surrounded by scientific instruments. No doubt the University of Manchester wanted to show it welcomed talented women as lecturers. However, by 1922 in complete contrast she is photographed reclining in a diaphanous dress in the provocative manner of the famed American dancer Isadora Duncan. This is a highly sexual image and significantly it was selected by both Ruth Hall and June Rose for the covers of their biographies of Marie Stopes.

In contrast to this provocative image Marie was later photographed, after her second marriage, wearing the flying gear of breeches to emphasise that she was 'a progressive new woman'.



Fig. 1.2 Marie Stopes posing in a fashionable diaphanous dress

One of the themes of this book is the surprising finding that Marie, trained as a scientist, could jettison the scientific approach when it suited her ends. It will be seen that her account of lack of sexual knowledge in her plea for the annulment of her first marriage was problematic and this is explored in a later chapter. Another example of her use of unscientific methods was in her method of evaluating the success of her birth control clinic. She was determined to show positive results and controversially counted those mothers who did not return for further consultations as a success for her methods. However, far from being a success for her clinic there could have been many reasons for the women's non-return. Marie's methodology was completely biased and this unscientific approach was correctly criticised by contemporaries who ran other birth control clinics.³⁶

Marie's contradictions were perhaps caused by her fragile mental health which was noted by family and friends Marie believed she was being persecuted, and this interpretation created enemies whether it was the medical profession, the Roman Catholic Church or even with other birth control pioneers. Her furious diatribe to a journalist from a local Dorset paper, found in the Portland Island Archive, gives a flavour of Marie's confrontational approach. 'Dr Stopes said she had tried to do something for the world, something in its way rather big and it had brought thorns and almost crucifixion.'³⁷ In spite of this dramatic speech the issue was not one of national importance such as the founding of birth control clinics, but a minor disagreement with a local authority officer over the her proposed museum in Dorset. This confrontational approach can be seen in a later chapter on her battles with others who did not share her views.

Her son, Harry Stopes- Roe, believed there were traits of megalomania in his mother as Marie believed she could change the world. Her declaration on birth control to the 1920 Anglican Lambeth Conference is typical of her approach, 'My Lords, I speak to you in the name of God. You are his priests. I am his prophet.'³⁸ Marie's presumptuous claims were not well received by the bishops and a later chapter describes how it took Dr Helena Wright's low-key professional approach to sway them at the next Lambeth Conference.

Marie's personality disorder was recognised by contemporary friends and commentators. Harold Begbie, in a broadly sympathetic appreciation of Marie written in 1927, thought it was possible to say Marie was suffering from egomania and he compared her utterances with those given centuries earlier given by St Joan of Arc.³⁹ Similar concerns were later voiced by the

BBC when Marie was interviewed about a proposed broadcast on birth control. A confidential memorandum from D.G. to D.D.G written on 1 November 1935 observes that Marie was not what he had feared as she looked quite ordinary with no make-up and simply dressed, and it was only when she started talking on her subject that she was somewhat fanatical.⁴⁰ Professor Laurie Taylor in 1984 also describes her as eccentric, shrill and not prepared to take arguments other than her own into consideration.⁴¹

There were contradictions in Marie's personality.⁴² She could be charming to acquaintances but less understanding to family. Her emotions were often shallow, as can be seen in the resentment of her sister's final illness. Mary Stocks maintained a life-long friendship with Marie who recognised her friend's faults. She writes that Marie 'was often enormously sympathetic and helpful above the call of duty to complete strangers, even if she was less than pleasant to individuals closer at hand, not to mention being creepily smarmy towards those she considered to be the great and the good'.⁴³ This is illustrated by Marie's *Coronation Ode to George VI* written in 1937 where she gushingly describes 'The dazzling spear-point of an Empire's aim'. In contrast to her admiration of the monarch's special occasion, Marie pointedly did not attend her son's wedding.⁴⁴

This introductory chapter concludes by giving an outline of this book's approach to Marie's biography. Chapter 2 discusses the important influence of her father, the archaeologist Henry Stopes, and her mother Charlotte, a Shakespearean scholar. Marie's intellectual development is traced in Chap. 3 together with her enthusiasm for palaeobotany and her remarkable personal and academic achievements in this area are highlighted. Chapter 4 describes the circumstances in which Marie came to abandon her academic career and become a sexual revolutionary through the writing of *Married Love*. The next chapters concentrate on Marie's birth control work. Chapter 5 details the opening of her birth control clinic in London and Chap. 6 outlines how Marie's actions encouraged the foundation of other birth control clinics across the United Kingdom. As a result of her nationwide publicity Marie received thousands of letters from men as well as women, and she developed a career as an 'agony aunt' which is discussed in Chap. 7. The following chapters describe Marie's conflicts. Marie could be an abrasive personality and Chap. 8 describes her confrontation with those who she regarded as the Establishment. Chapter 9 discusses Marie's relationship with Eugenics. Although undoubtedly Marie held some Eugenic views the case is strongly argued that Marie was a maverick Eugenicist in conflict

with mainstream Eugenacists. This biography concludes in Chap. 10 by looking at Marie's last years and evaluating Marie's lasting impact on the twenty-first century.

In order to help contextualise Marie's life, brief accounts are given at the end of the book of her friendship networks. These include close friends such as Mary Stocks and the organiser of her Stockport meetings, Elsie Plant.

Marie was certainly a flawed genius but this is not to detract from her remarkable achievements. When Marie wrote in her *Introduction to Botany* in 1919 that 'the ultimate result of all the growth and reactions is the reproduction of the individual' she could not have foreseen that this questioning would take her to personal sexual issues.⁴⁵ Marie was never conventional or boring, as this research shows by analysing her fight for academic excellence, sexual understanding and the provision of accessible birth control.

NOTES

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2. Margaret Pyke, 1962 quoted in Ruth Hall, *Marie Stopes*. (London, 1976) p. 5.
Stopes, Marie, *Married Love*. (Oxford University Press, reprint, 2004) p. 17.
3. Stopes, Marie, *Man, Other Poems and a Preface*. 1914. Quoted in Eaton, Peter and Warwick, Marilyn, (London, 1977) p. 9.
4. Marie Stopes is featured by Sheila Rowbotham in her *A Century of Women*. (London, 1997) p. 646.
5. Taylor, Laurie, 'The Unfinished Sexual Revolution', *Journal Biosocial Science*, October 1971, vol. 3, issue 4.
6. Stopes, Marie, *Botany. The Modern Study of Plants*. (London, 1919) p. 58.
7. Cooke, M.B., *Woman's Leader*, 4 May 1923.
8. Debenham, Clare, *Birth Control and the Rights of Women. Post-suffrage Feminism in the Early Twentieth Century*. (London, 2014).
9. Thane, Pat, 'What Difference Did the Vote Make? Women in Public and Private Life Since 1918', *Historical Research*, vol. 76, issue 192, pp. 268–285.
10. Cook, Hera, *The Long Sexual Revolution. English Women, Sex and Contraception 1800–1975*. (Oxford, 2004).
11. Stocks, Mary, *Still More Commonplace*. (London, 1973) p. 20.

12. Williams, Shirley, *Climbing the Bookshelves*. (London, 2010) p. 5.
13. Claire (surname withheld) in conversation with Clare Debenham, 7 June 2015.
14. Mary Stopes- Roe to Clare Debenham in 2014.
15. Roberts, Robert, *The Classic Slum*. (London, 1971), pp. 52, 231, 232.
16. Debenham, Clare, 'Mrs Elsie Plant: Suffragette, Socialist and Birth Control Activist.' *Women's History Review*, 2010, vol. 19, issue 1, pp. 145–158.
17. Harry was born healthy and strong on 27 March 1924.
18. Hall, Ruth, *Dear Dr Stopes*. (London, 1978) p. 25.
19. Toole, Millie, *Mrs Bessie Braddock*. (London, 1957) p. 49.
20. Opie, Iona and Peter, *Law and Language of Schoolchildren*. (London, 1959).
21. *Daily Mail*, 5 June 2014.
22. Harry Stopes Roe to Clare Debenham April 2013.
23. Maude, Aylmer, *Marie Stopes. Her Work and Play*. (London, 1932) p. 16.
24. Briant, Keith, *Marie Stopes*. (London, 1962).
25. Stopes-Roe, Harry and Scott, Ian, *Marie Stopes and Birth Control*. (London, 1974).
26. Hall, Ruth, *Marie Stopes*. (London, 1976). Rose, June, *Marie Stopes and the Sexual Revolution*. (London, 1992).
27. Hall, Ruth, *Marie Stopes*. (London, 1976) p. 13.
28. Green, Stephanie, *The Public Lives of Charlotte and Marie Stopes*. (London, 2013).
29. Hall, Lesley A., *Women's History Review*, 2013, vol. 22, pp.253–266.
30. Briant, Keith, *Marie Stopes*. (London, 1962) p. 13.
31. BBC Written Archives, Caversham Park, Marie Stopes, File1 1931–1962.
32. Harry and Mary Stopes- Roe to Clare Debenham 2013.
33. Elsie Plant interview with Clare Debenham 10 May 1978. Debenham, Clare, *Women's History Review*, February 2010, vol. 19, issue 1, pp. 145–158.
34. David Paton to Clare Debenham, 22 May 2007.
35. Times Higher Education interview with Professor Stephen Hopwood, *THE*, 27 July 2017.
36. Florence, L.S., *Birth Control on Trial*. (London, 1930) p. 30.
37. *Dispatch*, 21 September 1926.
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39. Begbie, Harold, *Marie Stopes. Her Mission and Her Personality*. (London, 1927) p. 6.
40. BBC Archives, Caversham Park, Marie Stopes File 1, 1930–1960.
41. Taylor, Laurie, 'The Unfinished Sexual Revolution', *Journal of Biosocial Science*, 1971, vol. 3, issue 4, pp. 473–492.

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CHAPTER 2

Family Values

Abstract Marie's intellectual development was influenced by her father and mother. Henry Stopes was a brewer by profession, but the evidence shows his passion was for archaeology. His research expeditions captured Marie's interest and he encouraged her intellectual development. Marie had a warm relationship with her father, but a much more difficult relationship with Charlotte, her mother. The home schooling of her two daughter was not a success. Charlotte was a noted scholar and published extensively on Shakespeare. A feminist, Charlotte was involved in the suffrage struggle and wrote *British Freewomen* concerning the role of noblewomen in history. Marie's relationship with her younger sister Winnie, is often overlooked, but their deteriorating emotional bond sheds light on Marie's personality.

Keywords Father: Henry Stopes • Mother: Charlotte Carmichael Stopes
• Sister: Winnie Stopes

In Marie's letters to her archaeologist father she often concluded by 'sending her love to the flints'. British Library. Stopes Papers¹

This chapter discusses Marie's often strained relationship with her mother Charlotte, her warmer relations with her father, Henry Stopes and the shifting relationship with her younger sister Winnie. Her parents were



Fig. 2.1 Mother: Charlotte Carmichael Stopes

particularly important in influencing Marie's intellectual development and Henry Stopes encouraged Marie's interest in discovering the past. Charlotte's role in her marriage demonstrated how a determined wife could still pursue independent intellectual pursuits.

With typical lack of modesty Marie liked to claim that she was a child of the prestigious British Association for the Advancement of Science (BAAS).² She triumphantly explained to Aylmer Maude that she was a 'British Association baby'. It was at an intellectual BAAS meeting in



Fig. 2.2 Father: Henry Stopes

Glasgow that her parents, Charlotte Carmichael and Henry Stopes, first met. Superficially they appear to have been a rather unlikely couple as Charlotte was eleven years older than Henry and she was handsome rather than attractive. Nevertheless, Henry took the initiative after that meeting and courted Charlotte for three years until they married in 1879. Both her parents served as important role models for Marie. Marie on her own

marriage kept her maiden name of Stopes, which was another cause of friction with her first husband.

Henry had developed his interest in palaeontology in his schooldays and this passion gradually took over his relationships, his time and finances. On 16 September 1876 he mounted a press cutting in his book, now archived in the British Library, which recorded a geological excursion of twenty members including Mr H. Stopes and Miss Carmichael.³ Henry later pencilled in the information that subsequently Miss Carmichael became Mrs H. Stopes. Charlotte had enjoyed her visit to Paris as a governess and might well have anticipated visiting such cultural cities of Paris, Venice, Vienna, on her honeymoon. Instead their honeymoon consisted of a grand tour of continental breweries followed by site visits to archaeological digs in Egypt. Henry Stopes was the first archaeologist to identify a palaeolithic hand axe in Egypt.

Charlotte later claimed that it was Henry's spiritual qualities that attracted her. Biographer Ruth Hall quotes from her letter to Marie 'When I first met my husband his strongest attraction for me was his solid religion.'⁴ There have been suggestions that Charlotte, then approaching thirty-eight years old, only married twenty-seven year-old Henry because she was worried about being left 'an old maid'. However, there is absolutely no evidence that Charlotte was anything but happy in her single situation, although she may have optimistically envisaged a more comfortable middle-class existence with a soulmate and the bonus of foreign travel.

Certainly Charlotte, like many Victorian wives, was wary of sexual relations and emphasised spiritual rather than physical relations. Henry, when they had only been married seven years, begged his wife in this letter:

Dearest, will you put from you the teachings of your splendid brain and look only into the depths of your heart and see if you can but find there the love that every woman should find for the father of her babies....We would put from us the seven blank years that are ended and commence the truer honeymoon.⁵

Evidently this heartfelt entreaty by Henry did not have any effect as Charlotte wrote, on visiting Henry on his deathbed in 1902, 'The sensual look has passed from your face that so pained me and you seem to have regained the chastened expression of your youth.'⁶ Marie's biographer Dr Lesley Hall regards this as a typical Victorian attitude to sexual relations.

It is ironic that the tragic breakdown of marital relations should have happened to the parents of the author of *Married Love*. However, it is an over-simplification to characterise Charlotte and Henry's union as a cold, loveless marriage. The couple willingly helped each another in their academic enterprises and they were both proud of the achievements of Marie. Charlotte touchingly kept the envelope containing Henry's first letter until her own death. He habitually addressed his letters to Charlotte as 'My darling'. Charlotte continued to write affectionate letters to Henry even after the shock discovery of her husband's bankruptcy.

Charlotte was born into the wrong age to take advantage of advances in the rights of women. Part of the tension between mother and daughter may have arisen because it was the daughter who benefitted from advances in women's academic progress and not the mother. Charlotte came from a family where money was in short supply. Her father, James Ferrier Carmichael, a landscape painter, died when she was fourteen. Charlotte's mother does not appear to have given her young daughter any outward show of love and affection. Charlotte, on completing her schooling, took a post as a governess, then one of the few careers open to her. She performed exceptionally well in university extra-mural courses but she was not permitted to obtain a degree.

Charlotte believed that her experience in teaching meant she was qualified to teach her two daughters, Marie and Winnie, in their own home. Theoretically, with her educational experience and feminist beliefs, Charlotte should have been able to inspire her daughters. However, rather than the girls' education being an exciting experience where lessons could be tailored to her children's interests, these appeared to be barren enterprises. Marie later recollected that the house was suffused by stern Scottish old-fashioned Presbyterian. The syllabus appeared to be based on their mother's university courses with little effort to adapt it to the intellectual needs of young girls. Thus Greek and Latin lessons were given to Marie at the age of five. Her mother did not agree with giving praise or encouragement to her daughters and so it was a grim and not very productive schooling.

Charlotte was happy to resume her own scholarship when Marie was eight years old. After studying at Edinburgh University she became a distinguished Shakespearean scholar who went on to write a whole series of learned pamphlets and books on Shakespeare. Marie explained to Aylmer Maude how 'Charlotte was one of the pioneers of women's University education, having been the first woman to take the University Certificate in Literature and Philosophy at Edinburgh University.'⁷

Charlotte's first book *The Bacon/Shakespeare Question* was published in 1888 and she meticulously refuted popular speculation the Francis Bacon was the true author of Shakespeare's plays: 'If I can only prove that he wrote "some", or even that he was *capable* of writing "any" I can prove their universal assertion *false* by a particular.'⁸ However, Charlotte's Shakespearean scholarship was at times down-played by her academically competitive daughter. Aylmer Maude echoes Marie when he dismissively refers to 'Charlotte's skill in ferreting out facts and deciphering early records.'⁹ Yet Charlotte eventually became a nationally respected and recognised Shakespearean scholar.

Significantly in Charlotte's book *The Bacon/Shakespeare Question* there is a whole chapter giving details of the brewing industry in Elizabethan times, probably written with help from her husband. Under the pseudonym of C. Graham, Charlotte also published a series of articles in the magazine *Wine, Spirit and Beer* on 'The Bacon-Shakespeare Question in Relation to Wine, Spirits and Beer' which were published in 1888. Charlotte must have been helped in placing these articles by her husband's insider knowledge of breweries.

Charlotte's research interest developed into the study of women's history. Her classic text *British Freewomen: Their Historical Privilege* was published in 1894 and was frequently cited by members of the emerging suffrage movement. It was a discussion, based on research into primary sources, of female empowerment. She considered the achievements of historic queens such as the warrior Queen Boadicea of the Iceni, the learned Hilda Abbess of Whitby, and Queen Consorts such as Queen Sexburga of the West Saxons. Charlotte included in her book noblewomen who had held historic offices such as High Constable, High Steward and High Chamberlain. In her chapter 'The Turn of the Tide' Charlotte traced the progress that had been made in the advancement of women in universities such as Oxford, Cambridge, Edinburgh and Manchester by examining their charters.

British Freewoman, through its historic arguments, became a polemic for women's rights at the turn of the twentieth century. Charlotte declared 'How can men be truly free that ignore, for others, the liberties founded on the same reasoning by which they enfranchised themselves?'¹⁰ She drew upon sources such as John Stewart Mill and Dr Richard Pankhurst from Manchester to pose such awkward questions as 'Why may a noble and loving mother have less power over the children she bore and toiled for, than a selfish, indifferent father?'¹¹ Members of Richard Pankhurst's family,

particularly wife Emmeline and daughter Christabel, were later to be in the forefront of the campaign for women's suffrage. Laura Mayall points out the importance of Charlotte's work in women's history with its themes of loss, resistance and recovery.¹²

Charlotte's campaigning zeal led her to join the Rational Dress Society in 1888 which allowed women physical freedom and condemned tight lacing. In 1889 she gave a paper on this subject to the BAAS which stressed its importance for women's health. Charlotte bombarded newspapers and magazines with articles on rational dress, including that edited by Oscar Wilde. Rational dress became increasingly popular and so allowed women to participate in activities such as cycling. Marie, although embarrassed by the clothes her mother made her wear as a child, endorsed this philosophy and as an adult wore loose clothing. She made her young son Harry wear rather eccentric rational dress and as explained in Chap. 1, this was the first glimpse of him by his future wife.

It was natural that Charlotte, given her views on strong female historical figures, should become a member of the movement campaigning for women's suffrage. She distributed the Preface of *British Freewomen* to the Women's Suffrage Societies. Charlotte wrote pamphlets and spoke publicly in favour of women's rights embracing the suffrage cause before her daughter. In the Stopes-Roe Archives there is a poster from 1898 advertising Mrs Stopes' *Address on Suffrage* at Stratford-upon-Avon Town Hall and in 1908 Charlotte appeared on a speakers' platform with Christabel Pankhurst. Later Marie was to cultivate leaders of the suffrage movement such as Lady Constance Lytton but rarely paid tribute to her own mother's suffrage experiences.

Mother and daughter had similar academic interests and a commitment to feminist issues. It therefore would have been natural if the two women could have attended meetings together and bonded as mother and daughter but this never appeared to have happened. Professor Stephanie Green, in her perceptive biography, argues the two women were of different generations with different perspectives. Marie scathingly, and unjustly, wrote to Charlotte from Manchester, belittling her mother's achievements for women's suffrage, 'I was speaking about the subject today and not one...[had]... even *heard* of you.'¹³ Stephanie Green argues that Marie's view of her radical mother as demanding, annoying and eccentric arose from Marie's need for public recognition herself. It was not until the end of her life that Charlotte formed a warmer relationship with her daughter.

Her husband's death left Charlotte in dire financial circumstances, but she was awarded a Government pension of £50 a year in consideration of her literary work, especially in connection with the Elizabethan period. Subsequently, in 1907, she was given a further grant of £75 a year from the Carnegie Trust to continue her research. In 1912 she was elected an honorary member of the Royal Society of Literature in recognition of her Shakespearean scholarship.

In spite of all her published books and articles, Charlotte remained an outsider. She was the wrong sex, did not have a degree, did not belong to the right clubs and she did not hold a university post. With the exception of the Bacon controversy her concerns were no longer in the mainstream of debates in English literature. This enabled other academics to patronise her by unfairly criticising lack of organisation in her work. One male critic, in a note held in the British Library Archive, sarcastically asserted that the making of a good book, as distinct from writing a book with a great deal of good in it, was not within her scope.¹⁴

After her mother's death Marie, perhaps because it would then favourably reflect on her, was keen for her mother's literary contribution to be recognised. In 1930 Marie commissioned scholar Frederick Boas to write an appreciation to be read before the Royal Society of Literature but he gave faint praise to what he regarded as the fading voice of late Victorian amateurism.¹⁵ Subsequently Boas' paper was placed in the British Library where Charlotte's personal papers were archived. Stephanie Green rightly provides a positive view of Charlotte's achievements and influence on Marie: 'Charlotte's high intellectual and moral standards nevertheless provided Marie with the foundation for her public ambitions.'¹⁶

Marie's father, Henry Stopes, tried to balance his responsibility to the family brewing business with his passion for fossils. Henry Stopes, on the death of his older brother, joined the family firm and redesigned the brewery in Colchester. Initially Henry was recorded as being successful with his architecture of new breweries. *The German and London Brewers' Journal* of December 1881 reported how the machinery in the Stopes' stand in London attracted an admiring crowd. Henry found time to stand in the 1889 London County Council but was fined for exceeding the limit on official expenses. His business got deeper and deeper into debt and he was eventually declared bankrupt. Dr James Sumner of the University of Manchester, argues that Henry's principled siding with the farmers against the brewers over the passing of the Pure Beer Bill was one factor in him

losing valuable business for his brewery.¹⁷ None of the family appeared to blame Henry for his bankruptcy, though Charlotte was to write after his death that she had never before in her married life carried on for two and a half years without sinking deeper into debt.

Dr Francis Wenban-Smith, of the University of Southampton has undertaken a positive re-evaluation of Stopes' archaeological achievements which until recently had been dismissed by academics as just the work of an eccentric amateur. Henry Stopes created what was arguably the largest private collection of lithic artefacts which, at its peak, contained between 100,000 and 200,000 specimens. To allow them to be seen in context the specimens were carefully labelled with site locations. On his death, Henry bequeathed his collection to his wife with the understanding she would sell it to try to clear debts and not allow it to be broken up. Finally, it was purchased by Cardiff University, now the National Museum of Wales. Henry's collection consisted of over 200 crates.¹⁸

Marie appeared to form a far closer relationship with her father than with her mother. It was Henry who encouraged Marie's intellectual imagination by treating her as a valued assistant. As a young girl Marie was taken out on expeditions by her father and watched how he was able to prise flints out of the rocks and later identify them. She made a proficient pencil drawing of a stone neolithic tool in 1895 when she was still a schoolgirl and was so pleased with her drawing she retained it.¹⁹

When she became older her father showed Marie how to dig, wash and catalogue the specimens that they found. As the quotation at this chapter heading, taken from letters to her father and retained in the British Library, shows, Marie affectionately concludes her correspondence by jokingly sending her love to his collected flints. When Henry donated part of his flint collection to the museum of the Society of Antiquaries in Edinburgh he chose Marie to make the presentation to Dr Anderson, the Director of the Museum. Marie's biographer June Rose points out that this discussion of the flints gave Marie the first glow of recognition that she could research and communicate on Science subjects.²⁰ Maude recounts that, as result of her demonstration to the Society, she was invited to make a presentation on the flints to her entire school.²¹

Kate Hill at the Women's History Conference 2015 presented a stimulating paper where she investigates the popularity for Victorian women of county archaeological societies. These women enjoyed the excavations with their husbands, interpreting the finds and were meticulous in their specialised drawings of specimens. Marie was excited by their discoveries

of flints but was encouraged by her father to adopt a more theoretical and academic approach than the average female collector.

However, it was not only Marie who was drawn into the enthusiasm of their archaeological digs but the whole family which included Charlotte and Winnie. Marie describes their enterprise: 'Father didn't merely buy the best specimens...he went to the pits himself, often taking the whole of his family...and we searched for days at a time.....We brought home to his collection not only the best and handsomest axes but all scraps of stone which showed any sign of human workmanship.'²² She applied this 'hands-on' philosophy to her own work in palaeobotany.

There was of course the public humiliation of Henry's bankruptcy in the intellectual and social circles in which they moved so Henry increasingly took refuge in his palaeolithic excavations in Swanscombe, Kent where they had bought a house. He continued to be supported by Charlotte who took a short course in field archaeology and often accompanied Henry on his expeditions. After her husband's death, Charlotte continued his research by making an excursion to Rickmansworth to try to identify the true provenance of a particularly fine hand axe she had found in a gravel consignment used for road building on Hampstead Heath. She also made a presentation of his work at the 1903 BAAS meeting at Southport.

Marie had hoped to present her degree results to her father as a final gift. She knew he was seriously ill with intestinal cancer and approached the University College London authorities to release her results early. Professor Olivier, her mentor, was understandably sympathetic and sent her a postcard confirming her outstanding results. She writes dramatically to her father 'I have got my degree. I am now a B.Sc. Not only have I got it I have got it very well, I have 1st class honours in Botany with the marks qualifying for a scholarship.' She stresses to her parents her remarkable achievement of obtaining double honours in her degree.²³ Tragically Henry Stopes died at fifty just after he received her news.

Marie endeavoured to protect her father's intellectual legacy. She wanted to prove her father correct in believing that the fossil specimen of a scallop shell he had acquired from the Red Cragg strata had a crudely carved face. This would give proof of 'man's extreme antiquity' and would place intelligent human beings in England over 2 million years ago. However Henry Stopes' findings were rejected and mocked and now it is generally believed that works of art did not come into human existence until 30,000 years ago.

It is often overlooked that Marie had a younger sister Winnifred who was born on 13 March 1884. Winnie was always overshadowed by her

highly intelligent sister but nevertheless played an important role in the family dynamics. Winnie had a congenital heart condition and often slept until lunchtime. In spite of the home schooling in her early years it was left to the school principal at North London Collegiate School for Girls to recognise Winnie's illness and send a note to her mother warning how excessive exercise could make Winnie go pale in appearance.²⁴ In consequence, Winnie was physically unwell for most of her school years but intellectually she was able. Winnie won prizes at the North London Collegiate for her holiday work in Scripture and Science.

At the age of nineteen Winnie started a course on book binding and worked from home. I have been privileged to handle one of Winnie's neatly leather-bound eighteenth-century books, *Songs for the Nursery*, which the family has retained in Mary Stopes-Roe's Collection. At that period the sisters had a close relationship. Marie tried to help Winnie in her new book-binding business by suggesting designs for book covers and typically both women complained about their mother.²⁵ Marie offered Winnie advice from dress-making to cookery. In these early affectionate letters Marie called her sister 'Kidlet' and Winnie nicknames her sister 'Bun' short for Bunny. Winnie's letters show her to be lively and articulate and not in the least in awe of her more academic sister. They swapped confidences about their mother and friends. Marie wrote to her sister in 1901: 'Dear Winnie, Imagine my horror that I hadn't packed my nightdress! Don't tell father! Love from Bunny.' In turn Winnie thanked Marie for her little gifts such as 'the darling feathers'.²⁶

At first the two sisters joined in collective enterprises but sadly the changes in their relationship reflected the hardening of Marie's character. As a young girl Winnie joined in expeditions with her family to locate fossils. She was recorded as having discovered a rolled hand-axe at Ingress Abbey. Marie and Winnie went on holiday together in Devon and Marie wrote to her mother in 1909 that 'We really had a most excellent time in cave & tent. Winnie is chocolate brown and looks awfully well & so do I.' Winnie came in useful to act as a chaperone, for instance when Marie's friend Professor Kenjiro Fujii visited England from Japan. Winnie was trusted to carry out odd jobs for Marie, such as having Marie's own favourite childhood doll refurbished for Kenjiro's daughter.²⁷

Marie invited Winnie to stay with her in Manchester in 1905 but this offer was not accepted. However, Winnie moved into Marie's house at Well Walk, London in 1909 which was near their mother. However, Winnie's presence was obviously expendable. Marie wrote to her excitedly in 1911 that 'Dear Kid -tho' can't be sure till I am actually married, I want that room for a *man*!' It was to be decorated in restful colours.²⁸

Winnie's presence at Well Walk also appeared to come in useful when the relationship between Marie and her first husband deteriorated. When Aylmer Maude eventually moved into the house it was Winnie who provided breakfast and undertook cleaning duties. She even fed Marie's cat, Buster, when her sister was away.

Winnie perceptively reflected that:

I never was a companion from you because I hadn't the brains and more than ever when I am perfectly well aware that my mental capacity is ailing very rapidly, there would be no real pleasure for you having me with you and is only a worry to you having the extra thought of the trivial details of an invalid's life. Poor old Bun, I wish you had as good friends as I have.²⁹

However, Marie distrusted Winnie's friends feeling that they were taking advantage of Winnie, and so by extension Marie. Eventually relations between the two sisters became strained. Professor Stephanie Green controversially interprets this as 'learned dependency' and certainly Winnie increasingly relied on Marie.

Marie often complained about Winnie's requests for money which Marie protested that she could not afford. She blamed Winnie for wasting the funds that she sent her by spending it on doubtful friends. Marie often refused Winnie funding, and complained in July 1913 that Winnie was preventing her living peaceably. Eventually Marie sent Winnie a cheque for £30 with a list of these harsh conditions;

1. That Winnie was not to take any money from or bother their mother.
2. That she was not to cadge from friends.
3. That she was not to go to faith healers or cranks of any kind at all.
4. That she was to make the money last as long as possible since Marie was not be able to repeat the offer.³⁰

Although Marie contributed financially to Winnie, the earlier warmth seemed to have gone out of their relationship. For example, Winnie was supposedly too ill to attend Marie's second wedding to Humphrey Verdon Roe.

When Winnie's health deteriorated Marie paid for her sister to be cared for in a private nursing home but did not regularly visit her in the manner that she had visited her sick father. In the middle of Marie's libel action against Dr Halliday Sutherland heard in the High Court, the doctor in charge of Winnie's nursing home twice wrote to Marie warning that her sister's condition was drastically worsening. Marie believed that Winnie

would recover once again and indignantly replied, ‘As you can imagine I am under a very great strain of *urgent* work this week.’³¹ Tragically Winnie died the next day. This episode does not reflect well on Marie, although she paid for Winnie’s polished elm coffin and six bearers. Significantly Marie’s correspondence, archived in the British Library, gave her sorrow at her sister’s death as the reason for her lack of reply to letters that she received during that month.³²



Fig. 2.3 The sisters as children. Winnie Stopes (*left*) and Marie Stopes (*right*) (Stopes-Roe, Harry, *Marie Stopes*. p. 20)

The next chapter demonstrates how Marie's late father was to have a continuing influence on her academic development and how in later life her mother became much more supportive.

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Passionate About Palaeobotany

Abstract This chapter traces Marie's progress from a hardworking but undistinguished schoolgirl to a world-renown academic with a passion for palaeobotany. Marie's brilliant career as a student at UCL is analysed as is her time at the University of Munich where she gained her doctorate. Marie was appointed the first female lecturer at the University of Manchester and her experiences in the university and the city are described. Marie left to return to research at UCL and continued her romantic and professional relationship with Professor Kenjiro Fujii who she had met in Munich. Even after this romance ended she continued to organise a research expedition to Japan and undertook research in Canada.

Keywords Palaeobotany • University College London • University of Munich • Professor Fujii • Japan

*Palaeobotany is a science grossly neglected by the nation. It breaks my heart to see it so starved and neglected in this country.*¹ Marie Stopes

This chapter examines Marie Stopes' academic growth in palaeobotany and her considerable personal achievements which serve to encourage later female academics. Marie progressed from a hardworking but

undistinguished schoolgirl to a world-renown palaeobotanist whose research into fossilised plants took her to universities in London, Germany, Manchester and Japan.

The quotation at this chapter heading shows that Marie passionately believed that her science of palaeobotany was undervalued. She wanted to popularise her subject and successfully challenge the commonly held perception that 'fossil-botany was as dry-as-dust'. The fossils of long extinct reptiles such as dinosaurs had caught the popular imagination and Marie felt it unfair that plants, with an equally ancient history, were ignored or consigned to the back shelves in museums. In her popular science books for children, she wanted them to know as much about plants as they already did about animals such as their pets.² Marie explained how palaeobotanists studied extinct plant species by examining leaf impressions in rocks like sandstone or in coal, examining casts which had formed plant moulds, or under a microscope analysing leaves, stems or seeds which had been preserved by being petrified in substances like amber. Palaeobotanists could then use this evidence to build up an ecology of specific periods and so identify features such as climate change or geological movements.³

Marie only started developing academically when in 1892 she left her mother's tuition for a girls' school where she could board full-time. The school, carefully selected by her mother, was St George's High School in Edinburgh, founded by a group of suffragists. However, because of her mother's unconventional schooling Marie had large gaps in her scientific knowledge and was not as accomplished academically as her classmates. Her surviving school reports were sound but contained the remark that her pronunciation in French 'was not so good'.⁴ At fourteen Marie and her sister moved to London where her mother arranged for both girls to attend the highly regarded North London Collegiate School for Girls. Here, for the first time, Marie found her vocation in the Sciences. She wrote a paper on 'Glass' which was so accomplished for a schoolgirl that she again kept it amongst her private papers.⁵

One of the young teachers at the school, Clothilde Von Wyss, formed a close relationship with her. Marie continued to keep Clothilde's romantic outpourings which today would be considered completely unsuitable for a teacher to write to a pupil.⁶ 'Dear Child of Mine, Need I say that I have sent my special love to you. You have won it already. Whenever I think of you a strange gladness creeps over me. I feel rich in the thought of your love and less lonely. I am grateful to you for all you have done and said.' Obviously there was a reciprocal response on Marie's part but as

there are no surviving letters from Marie to Clothilde it is not known what was Marie's attitude to this unsuitable relationship.

It was largely because of the encouragement given by Miss Aitkin, the Chemistry mistress at North London Collegiate that Marie blossomed academically. Indeed, Miss Aitkin gave her special tuition which was so successful that when a teacher was off sick with scarlet fever Marie was able to take over some of her classes. Given her feminist politics, Charlotte might have wanted Marie to apply to an all-female college to study for her degree. However, Marie's headteacher at North London Collegiate encouraged her to disregard gender issues and apply to University College London (UCL) because she believed it was then the best place to study Science. Women had just been permitted to read for degrees there.

The person who changed the course of Marie's life was Professor Frances Wall Oliver who was a world famous authority on reproduction in plants. Her initial application to read Chemistry was rejected by UCL, but fortunately this Professor of Botany, recognised Marie's potential and encouraged her to make Botany her chief subject with Chemistry second. Marie characteristically showed a willingness to change direction and seize opportunities. Professor Oliver proved to be a powerful influence throughout Marie's academic career and was to later act as her mentor.⁷

Marie showed a remarkable capacity to understand complex rules and regulations turning them to her advantage. At the end of her first year at UCL she was given a gold medal in Botany and was ranked second in Zoology. This achievement would have been enough academic success for many undergraduates but Marie read the regulations and decided to take an original course of action. She discovered that by also registering as an external candidate at Birkbeck College she could complete her degree in two years rather than three, so saving her family money. This had never been done before and her tutors predictably advised against this. However, Marie proved her sceptics wrong as she was awarded an outstanding degree. She gained a BSc with First Class Honours in Botany together with Third Class Honours in Geology. Her mentor Professor Oliver, just before her father's death, was able to inform her of her degree results early.

As a post-graduate, Marie continued with her aim of obtaining the best possible scientific qualification in the shortest possible time. Her achievements were remarkable and even more so when taking into account that she was a female academic at a time when women were still denied access to some universities. Marie never recognised sex differences as a barrier to intellectual achievements or to her career. In spite of all this intellectual

activity she found time to pursue her feminist interests by becoming President of the UCL Women's Debating Society.⁸ No doubt her mother would have approved.

Marie received backing from Professor Oliver at UCL in support of her application for the prestigious post-graduate Gilchrist Scholarship. The UCL Gilchrist Scholarship was awarded to Marie and enabled her to work as Professor Oliver's assistant for a year. Her academic development was encouraged by him and in 1903 she published her first academic papers, 'On the leaf-structure of cordaites' and the 'Epidermoil layer of calamite roots'.⁹ Professor Oliver had international connections so Marie took advice from him concerning her overseas study and with her brilliant academic record she had a wide choice. Perhaps her mother, recently widowed and financially straightened, would have preferred her daughter to stay in London near her, but Charlotte to her credit did not try to prevent her daughter travelling abroad. Following Professor Oliver's advice on the best university to study palaeobotany, Marie selected for her post-graduate research the University of Munich Botanical Institute where the eminent Professor Goebel had an important collection of cycads and was a leading fossil plant expert.

Marie's research in Munich was largely concerned with the fertilisation of cycads which dated from the Jurassic period 200 million years ago to 145 million years ago. The outward appearance of cycads was not unlike palms, though botanically they were quite different in structure. Professor Goebel suggested that she should review the existing work on cycads and then submit a thesis which hopefully would become the standard work on the subject. Her time in Germany was academically productive and laid the foundations for a lifelong interest in these cycads. Marie later procured a large cycad which I have seen prominently on display in the museum she later founded in Dorset.

Marie's botanical drawings, in her authored books, show considerable talent as an illustrator. As well as drawings for her books such as *Ancient Plants* the University of Manchester Museum retains a beautiful watercolour of a cycad by her. She possessed considerable artistic as well as literary ability.

Marie's research concentrated on two groups of fossil plants: gymnosperms and angiosperms. The gymnosperm group includes cycads and conifers. They were eventually overtaken in plant numbers by the flowering group of plants known as angiosperms. Angiosperms include diverse plants from grasses to birch to magnolias. They first appeared 130 million years ago. Marie wanted to discover why the angiosperms, propagated by

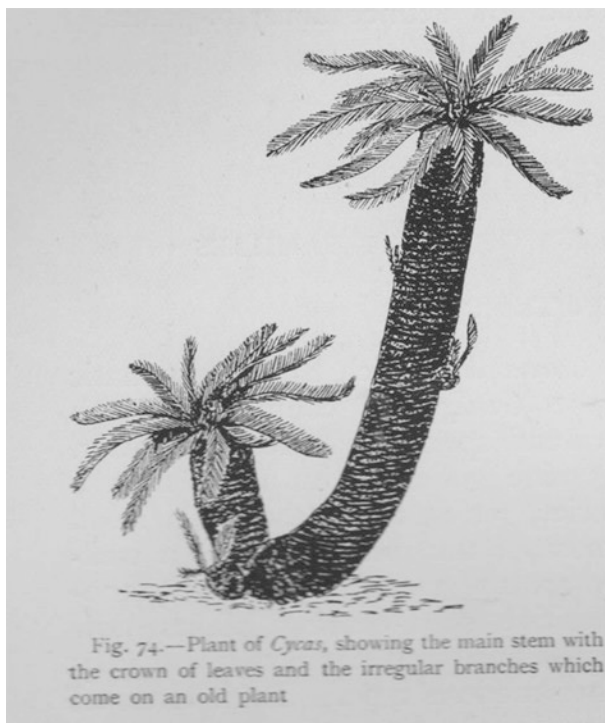


Fig. 3.1 Marie's illustration of her favourite cycad, plant family cycas, taken from her book *Ancient Plants* (Stopes, Marie, *Ancient Plants*. (London, 1910) p. 110)

seeds and protected by an ovary, had flourished while the more primitive form of plant, gymnosperms, had declined.

There were three major obstacles to Marie gaining her doctorate and each would have deterred a lesser person. Firstly, Professor Goebel warned her that no woman from the university had ever been allowed to take a doctorate. Secondly, the usual period for doctoral study was two years, but she only had funding for a year's study. Finally, there was the language difficulty. Professor Goebel spoke excellent English but Marie did not know German and was not gifted in languages. Her doctorate had to be read and defended in German at an oral examination.

These obstacles were gradually removed for her. Professor Goebel had the gender barrier to her PhD removed. Marie worked exceptionally hard to complete her research in a year, sometimes working for thirty-hour

periods, sustaining herself with beef tea made over a little spirit stove in the laboratory. Marie successfully learnt German taking every opportunity to practise with German speakers. She was allowed to obtain help from a Swiss student with German written work and although some of her German was not strictly correct she was able to be understood and passed her oral examination. Marie triumphed and was awarded in 1904 her doctorate magna cum laude. Her research subject was, as originally planned, the seed structure and function of cycads.

Although Marie informed her mother that she did nothing but work and sleep in Munich, this was not strictly true. She did permit herself the occasional break from work often with the cultured Professor Kenjiro Fujii. Marie later describes to her friend Aylmer Maude how she enjoyed the delights of Munich: the Opera, a great deal of dancing, excursions every weekend to the snow-mountains in the winter and to the Tyrolese flowing valleys in the summer. Though working hard at her studies Marie enjoyed joining in the leisure activities of her department and later remembered her magnificent Professor, ‘tall, ruddy-gold-haired, and sunny like a King in Saga, sledging with us students on the mountain-side. He tumbled in the snow, extricating himself laughing.’¹⁰ Marie had much more freedom in Munich than her strict mother permitted in England, and until World War II Marie regarded Munich as her second home, retaining fond memories of the city.

Professor Goebel and his wife were exceptionally kind to Marie and at the end of her research the Professor even offered her a post in his laboratory. Those nationalities working in the laboratory (all men) included a Polish professor, a Norwegian, a Dutch man, an American and the Japanese assistant professor Kenjiro Fujii from the Imperial University of Tokyo. He was on study leave in Munich and Marie was attracted to him. Marie admired Kenjiro’s intellectual achievements as he was an acknowledged expert on the structure and reproduction of the rare maidenhair tree, *Ginkgo bilbao*, considered holy by Buddhists. Marie was grateful for the help Kenjiro gave her with her work. Photographs from Marie’s album show them sitting side by side on wicker chairs on board ship.¹¹ The two went on expeditions together collecting specimens and gradually their relationship deepened.

This was Marie’s first meaningful relationship with a man, though as a girl Marie had had passionate friendships with women. Superficially this was an unlikely relationship as he was fourteen years older than Marie. Moreover Kenjiro was already married with a child, although his marriage was ending. Kenjiro may not have been commanding physically but he

had the ability to woo Marie romantically and she responded.¹² His farewell card given to her at Munich railway station read, ‘We will meet as though we met not, and part as though we parted not. Out of dreams into dreams.’¹³ This close relationship was to endure for a further five years. Marie did not appear to have given any consideration to Eugenic arguments about racial purity in her relationship with this Japanese man.



Fig. 3.2 Professor Kenjiro Fujii (Stopes-Roe, Harry and Scott, Ian, *Marie Stopes*. (London, 1970) p. 30)

Marie continued to gain the highest academic qualifications both in Germany and in England. As well as her PhD (Munich) in 1904 Marie was awarded a DSc (Lond) from her old university, University College London, in 1906. Marie had the distinction of being the youngest DSc in Britain and was proudly photographed in her doctoral robes.¹⁴



Fig. 3.3 Marie Stopes photographed in her Doctoral robes (University of Manchester Special Collections)

The supporting documentation for Marie's DSc is retained in its archives by UCL. This shows that along with her original paper Marie submitted a portfolio of peer reviewed papers which had already been published in professional journals such as *The New Phytologist* and *Annals of Botany*. Her meticulously illustrated paper, 'The colonisation of a dried river bed' was presented to the British Association for the Advancement of Science (BAAS) at Southport. This was appropriate given her parents' romantic history of their first encounter at a BAAS meeting.

In these academic papers Marie acknowledged the help of Professor Oliver at UCL whilst typically calling for more research to enable comparisons to be made between river beds. Significantly in her portfolio of papers at UCL, which I have read, is one dating from her time in Munich which explored the origin of cycads, 'Beitrage zur kenntnis der fortpelanzungorgane der cycadeen'.¹⁵ Marie recognises the help of Professor Goebel in her research and this paper was originally published in Regensburg.

Marie, with published papers and a doctorate, could look forward to a promising academic career but given her straightened financial circumstance she realised the need to convert her doctorate into a permanent academic position: however, in pre-suffrage Britain this was not an easy accomplishment for a female. Nevertheless, soon after leaving Munich, Marie applied for the position of demonstrator at Owens College which was later to become the University of Manchester. Marie was not optimistic about her job application as the Faculty of Science in Manchester had never before appointed a female member of academic staff. Professor Weiss, the Head of Department, wrote to Marie explaining how her appointment, as the first female lecturer, had to be referred to the University Council. However, Marie's appointment was successfully championed by Professor Boyd Dawkins who remembered her commitment in completing a fossil-hunting field trip on her own to Todmorden, West Yorkshire, when drenching rain had deterred others in the party from carrying on with the expedition.

The University of Manchester Council, while approving her appointment, expressed misgivings about a female appointment and so decided that her progress would have to be carefully scrutinised. One of the questions over Marie's appointment was how she could control rowdy male students, such as those studying medicine as their main degree subject and who had to take compulsory palaeobotany as a subsidiary subject but had little academic interest in it. Therefore Marie meticulously prepared for

her teaching position and out of professional interest attended lectures given by senior lecturers and professors. She was critical of their delivery and in contrast had little difficulty in holding the attention of her students. Marie was soon promoted by the university from demonstrator to lecturer. She, probably correctly, believed the lectures she gave on her favourite subject of cycads were the best she had ever delivered and they proved excellent training for her later career as public speaker.

Marie continued to collaborate with Kenjiro Fujii on investigating the plant structure of gymnosperms. In 1906 their research was published in a German academic paper, *Beihfte zum Botanischen Centralblatt* as 'The nutritive relations of the surrounding tissues to the Archegonia in Gymnosperms'.¹⁶ Theirs was an investigation of the female reproductive organs of archegonia, in the ancient plant category of gymnosperms which included the cycads which were of special interest to Marie. The acknowledgements in this academic paper included the universities of Manchester, Munich and Tokyo.



Fig. 3.4 Marie Stopes at her laboratory at the University of Manchester (University of Manchester Special Collections)

Marie also received an invitation to attend a Scientific Congress in Vienna so providing a further opportunity to meet Kenjiro Fujii for scientific collaboration. In later life Marie found it hard to work with other professionals but at this time her collaboration with Kenjiro was academically extremely profitable. In England she also collaborated with David Watson, a first class honours student from the University of Manchester who went on to become a professor and to specialise in vertebrate palaeontology.

Marie had the ability to make her plant research come alive to a non-specialist audience. Her approach can be seen in this 1907 academic paper, *Annals of Botany*, April 1907 on the study of calamites.¹⁷ These were, a species of plants existing over 300 million years ago, and distantly related to the horsehair fern. The calamites were tree-like and could grow over a hundred feet high. Marie examined slides from the Manchester University Museum and researched how they could recover from injury. She vividly describes how studying such specimens as wounded calamites, reveals that we have in 'fossil tissues the remains of plants which were once alive, combating with similar accidents in their environment to those which assail the plants of to-day, and were stricken down and fossilized in the midst of their activities'.¹⁸

Her publications demonstrated wide-ranging geographical research and included references to research in Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, Holland, Italy, Portugal, Russia, Sweden, Switzerland, Egypt, Australasia, Japan, India, China, North America, South America and the Antarctic. Between 1906 and 1910 Marie published at least three papers a year in academic journals and included references to six of her academic papers in the Catalogue, including her collaborative paper with Kenjiro on cretaceous plants given before the Royal Society in 1909. Her research led to closer collaboration between palaeontologists and chemists and Marie claimed later that her terminology had become widely adopted by professionals in coking and mining research.

Further academic recognition for Marie followed including in 1913 a prestigious invitation by the Geological Department of the British Museum to prepare a special catalogue on Cretaceous Flora. The geological Cretaceous period succeeded the Jurassic period, and existed over 65 million years ago. The warm climate and development of bees and other insects encouraged the growth of plant life. The comprehensive *Cretaceous Catalogue* took several years for Marie to prepare and was subsequently published in 1913 and 1915 by the Trustees of the British Museum

(Natural History) in two volumes.¹⁹ My own copy of the *Cretaceous Catalogue* contains the British Museum embossed coat-of-arms on its Frontispiece.

Once again demonstrating her flexibility, the subject matter at the centre of Marie's research changed during her time in Manchester. David Gelsthorpe, Curator of Earth Sciences at the University of Manchester Museum explains how Marie's research temporarily turned away from her beloved cycads to investigations of coal and coal balls.²⁰ Coal balls are a mass of plant debris which can be sectioned revealing the plant structures inside. The coal balls can contain petrified leaves, stems and seeds from primitive plants millions of years old which give evidence of the development of their reproductive systems and general development. Marie realised that her position in Manchester gave her ideal access to the coal-fields of Lancashire and Yorkshire which then provided the richest source of coal balls in the world. Unlike many botanists who just collected specimens and whom she dismissed as being like stamp collectors, Marie preferred to go down the mines herself to inspect the coalface and collect the best possible specimens. As seen in Chap. 2 her father had encouraged her to go fossil hunting in the field. Many of her specimens are housed in the Manchester Museum and her determination meant that she went out in all weathers, climbing over slippery crevices and venturing down mines.

No doubt the owners of coal mines welcomed the attention of an attractive female scientist who might alert them to new deposits and it was always difficult to refuse a determined Marie. One colliery owner, Mr W.H. Sutcliffe, even gave her his own fossil collection. Marie located in his collection a new species of fossil fern which she named in his honour, *Tubicaulis sutcliffii*, and presented a paper on her find to the Manchester Literary and Philosophical Society (Man. Lit and Phil) in 1906 where she was admitted as a member.²¹ This was an important discovery in palaeobotany.

In 1907 Marie presented a paper with David Watson to the Royal Society on "The present distribution and origins of the calcareous concretions known as "coal balls"". They argued that the intact plant preservation in the coal balls meant they could not have travelled any distance as they show bending of coal seams round the coal balls. In support of their argument they cited their discovery of coal balls in a small seam at Stalybridge, Cheshire as well as the Gannister seam at Bacup, Lancashire. Perhaps one of the most valuable pieces of their research is a list of fossil plants they found in coal balls in locations such as Oldham. Later in 1907 the two scientists travelled to Scotland to research the Jurassic flora (living

170 million years ago) on the Brora coast. Her research revealed that flora on the Yorkshire coast came from the same time period. Marie's academic research on coal development became nationally important because during World War I the Government was concerned with coal supply for industry and domestic use. Marie continued to publish papers on the composition of coal illustrated with engravings and photos up to 1935. All her books on fossil plants are lavishly illustrated with drawings of her specimens as well as photographs.²²

As well as her academic work Marie enjoyed the social side of the University of Manchester. She was welcomed into the Professors' Common Room by academic staff members Professor Schuster and Professor Samuel Alexander. She formed friendships with other lecturers. A postcard, now in my possession, dated September 1905 from a fellow lecturer, invited Marie to have dinner with her and the Examiner in Botany.²³

Marie also formed excellent relations with her students with whom she was popular. She was the only female academic lecturer and there was not the usual age difference between staff and students, so Marie was amused to be mistaken for a student. Marie turned her comparative youth to her advantage by taking small group of students out for walks, inviting them back for tea and organising fancy dress dances. This familiarity incurred the displeasure of some of the Faculty wives, such as the wife of her Head of Department, Evelyn Weiss, who wrote to Marie disapprovingly about the lecturer's relationships with students. Her light-hearted approach to professional relationships led her later to produce *The Sportophyte* which she describes as a journal of botanical humour. Her magazine includes 'student howlers' as well as anecdotes by botanical lecturers. In the opening editorial she states, '*The Sportophyte*, with all its teasing, has the warmest personal liking for even those with whom it most desports itself.' This was significantly dated 1 April 1912.

While grateful for her appointment as a lecturer Marie compared Manchester unfavourably to the cultured Munich where she had studied as a post-graduate. She complained that Manchester was narrow and boring. In 1904 she wrote to her sister Winnie dismissively about her dull life in Manchester:

17 Cromwell Avenue,

8 October 1904.

Dear Kid

I really have very little news. Manchester isn't at all thrilling like Munchen. There are no interesting people studying here.²⁴

Given the range of people Marie met in the University this dismissive attitude was perhaps a little unfair.

One of those who Marie met at the University of Manchester was the famous Antarctic explorer Captain Falcon Scott. Aylmer Maude describes how in 1904 Marie was invited by Lady Schuster to a lunch to meet him, and Captain Scott duly signed the University Visitor's Book.²⁵ He was trying to raise funds to pay off the debt incurred by his previous voyage. Over dinner and dancing the two met again and she tried to persuade him to take her and Lady Scott on his next Antarctic expedition so that she could collect specimens. Marie wanted to collect specimens that would help her research into the distribution of fossil plants. Scott wisely decided that Marie's participation in the expedition was impractical but offered to collect the specimens himself for her and he spent time with Marie at the university identifying the fossils that she wanted. The expedition was ill-fated and all the participants perished, but near the side of Captain Scott's body there were found fossil plants, later identified as *Glossopteris*, which he had collected from Queen Maud Mountain. David Gelsthorpe states this was the first recorded sighting of this plant in Antarctica and formed a vital piece of evidence for a super-continent of Gondwana.²⁶ Although she was a young female academic, Marie's request to join the expedition was not completely outrageous as she was some years later able to organise and lead a palaeobotany expedition in Japan.

Marie was keen to communicate her enthusiasm for her subject to an audience that was not just confined to the university. In 1904, the year of her appointment as a university lecturer, she gave a series of lectures to adults at the Manchester Art Museum and University Settlement. Their popularity shows the attraction of palaeobotany which was not then regarded as an obscure academic specialism. These twelve lectures on Tuesdays had the title of 'Nature Study: Plant Life'. She stresses the value of 'Systematic Biology from an Evolutionary Point of View' and her course outline shows she included her favourite topics of the plant groups, the gymnosperms and angiosperms (Lectures V and VI). As a new lecturer Marie must have been kept busy with her university work but these extramural lectures must have been something she felt committed to deliver. She was pleased with the result and this key syllabus is now retained in the British Library and the Stopes-Roe Collection.²⁷ Interestingly, although the course publicity gives Marie's doctoral qualification, she is billed as 'Miss Marie Stopes'.

Manchester Art Museum & University Settlement,
ANCOATS HALL, MANCHESTER.

Nature Study: Plant Life

("SYSTEMATIC BOTANY FROM AN EVOLUTION POINT OF VIEW"): a Course of LECTURES on alternate TUESDAYS, beginning **11th October 1904**, by

MISS MARIE C. STOPES, B.Sc., Ph.D.

✧ Syllabus ✧

✓ **Lecture I.**—General idea of the "Tree of Evolution" and the different levels in development reached by living plants, which are classified according to this into 5 great groups.

✓ **Lecture II.**—GROUP I.: *Thallophyta* (algæ and fungi) with special attention to the position of moulds and toadstools. Contrast between stage of evolution in Groups i. and ii. GROUP II.: *Bryophyta*; special reference to mosses.

✓ **Lecture III.**—Account of Group iii.: *Pteridophyta*, contrasted with Groups i. and ii. Different levels of evolution in the group, with special reference to Horsetails and Club Mosses.

✓ **Lecture IV.**—GROUP III. continued. Special reference to Ferns. Different classes of Ferns. "Missing links" between Groups iii. and iv.

✓ **Lecture V.**—GROUP IV.: *Gymnosperms*, contrasted with Group iii. Classification of chief members of Group iv. Special reference to Pines, Larches, and Yew.

✓ **Lecture VI.**—GROUP V.: *Angiosperms*, contrasted with Group iv. The two chief classes of Group V. and the structures that separate them.

✓ **Lecture VII.**—CLASS I.: *Dicotyledons*. Typical characters of, and different cohorts, e.g., *Amentifera*, trees with simple flowers. Special reference to Alder, Birch, Hazel, Oak, Beech and Willow.

✓ **Lecture VIII.**—*Dicotyledons* continued. Flowers with many free petals (Polypetalæ). Orders *Ranunculaceæ* and *Nymphaeaceæ*. Tendencies of the orders.

✓ **Lecture IX.**—*Dicotyledons* continued. Polypetalæ with cup-like receptacle (Calycifloræ). Orders *Rosaceæ* and *Leguminosæ* contrasted with *Ranunculaceæ*.

✓ **Lecture X.**—*Dicotyledons* continued: plants with petals joined to cup (Gamopetalæ) and ovary superior (Hypogynæ). Orders *Labiataæ*, *Scrophulariaceæ*, and *Primulaceæ*.

✓ **Lecture XI.**—*Dicotyledons* continued: Gamopetalæ with ovary inferior (Epigynæ). Orders *Campanulaceæ* and *Compositæ*. Apex of development in *Dicotyledons*.

✓ **Lecture XII.**—*Monocotyledons* contrasted with *Dicotyledons*. Possible place in tree of Evolution. Typical order *Liliaceæ*.

Admission to above Lectures, Free.

Fig. 3.5 The hand-out for Marie Stopes lectures on Plant Life showing the specialist topics to be covered

While a lecturer in Manchester, Marie also accepted an invitation to speak at the Ancoats Brotherhood. Although Ancoats was an overcrowded district consisting of factories and crowded tenements, Marie typically exaggerated the deprivations of her audience when later commenting to biographer Aylmer Maude.²⁸ Marie claimed that she had come into contact with the worse conditions of city life ‘the acute pain of seeing human beings under such appalling conditions were undermining her strength to such an extent it was impossible to go on’. She was invited to speak on ‘the family tree of the plant world’. Marie wrote to her sister Winnie ‘Last night I gave a really good lecture to my working men. They were pleased I think. I felt like a small kitten impudently lecturing an old dog.’

Marie’s description of the Ancoats Brotherhood’s members was inaccurate as the Brotherhood was a learned society whose annual subscriptions were out of the reach of poor working-class people. The wealthier members were encouraged to give donations. Charles Rowley, the founder of the Ancoats Brotherhood in 1878 was a picture-framer and he recorded that the membership of the Brotherhood consisted of labour aristocrats such as printers, joiners as well as journalists, parsons, several members of parliament and a number of JPs. The Society welcomed women members but they were few in number. Sheila Rowbotham in her book on radicals in Britain and the United States commends the Brotherhood’s cultural significance. Rowley had a William Morris-style vision of linking craft-knowledge with high culture.²⁹ By the 1890s it had attracted prestigious artists such as William Morris himself, and hosted world famous speakers such as the Russian Anarchist Prince Peter Kropotkin and the author George Bernard Shaw. Marie did not appear to appreciate that it was an honour for her to be asked to give a lecture in such esteemed company.

For Marie the personal was also the academic. Kenjiro managed to visit Marie in Manchester at the end of her first term. He had left Munich for London to carry out research with Marie’s former professor at UCL and while in the city he took the opportunity of visiting Marie’s mother Charlotte and her sister Winnie. Winnie had already met Kenjiro in Munich when she had acted as a chaperone for Marie. The British Library archive retains a polite letter that Kenjiro wrote to Charlotte about their meeting: ‘I should like to thank you for the lovely time in the absence of your daughter.’³⁰ Charlotte advised Kenjiro to see a production of *The Tempest* and Winnie lent him her volume of Tennyson’s poems. Marie and Kenjiro spent Christmas together visiting the Botanic

Gardens at Kew They then declared their love for one another and agreed to marry in eighteen months when Kenjiro's divorce was finalised. The two exchanged passionate letters, Marie confiding to him, 'Sweet, I long so for the physical touch of your hands on mine and to look into your eyes.' In 25 April 1905 Kenjiro sent her a betrothal box of flowers: 'Bitte dich, gedenke an: White of the lily as pure as my love and red of the rose as deep as my love. It will be as it is. Good night, dear, good night.'³¹

Marie did not want to be separated from her beloved professor for any length of time but Kenjiro could not extend his stay and Marie did not have the private means to travel to Japan. The answer to their dilemma was provided by their common research interests. Kenjiro sent her nodules from the island of Hokkaido which revealed the presence there of fossilised angiosperms. She successfully applied to the Royal Society to develop her work on the origins and development of angiosperms because palaeobotanists wanted to find out when and why they had become more successful than non-flowering gymnosperms. Marie was the first woman to receive one of their awards and Professor Goebel was one of those to have provided references.

However, shortly before she set sail for Japan in 1907, Marie realised that Kenjiro's attitude towards her had changed. On a personal level he must have become aware of the contradictions in Marie's personality. On a professional level Kenjiro must have realised that Marie was the more established professionally in Britain and in spite of his reputation in Japan, he might have difficulty gaining a post in an English university. Kenjiro offered up his suspected ill health as a reason to gently end the relationship and diplomatically claimed that he might have contracted leprosy. In fact, Kenjiro lived to be eighty-six and had two common-law wives, one of whom he married at the age of eighty-two.

Even though one of her main reasons to visit Japan had disappeared, it was too late to cancel her expedition. Marie proceeded to immerse herself in Japanese academic and cultural life. It was highly unusual for women to organise and take charge of men in expeditions, but Marie became a role model for later women's challenges. There were no female Japanese scientists but Marie was extended the courtesy of being treated as an honorary man. In August she went on a collecting trip to Hokkaido with a professor as interpreter, two guides and thirty coolies to negotiate challenging river beds and thick bamboos. At the Botanical Institute in Tokyo, Kenjiro had previously found her nearby lodgings and had installed specialist

fossil-cutting machinery. At the hot-spring resort of Shiobara Marie collected fossil insects and leaves from sixty-six million years ago. Her work on the early angiosperms became academically significant.

In 1910 Marie published her experiences in *A Journal from Japan*³² which took the form of a diary and shows how she was able to link art with science. Below are typical extracts from her entries showing her discoveries in palaeobotany together with her experiences of Japanese life, both academic and social:

- January 18. I worked at the fossils all day and this evening, commencing at 5, was the Biologists' supper.
- May 30. Fossils all morning – and preparing microscope etc for my Monday's expedition, when I am going after cycads. Went along to tea with Professor F – who is little better now, and from whom I needed some information about the place I was going to.
- June 1. After seven hours I landed at Yejiri and went in a kuruma to a very noted cycad temple. I deposited my microscope and baggage on the temple steps, which I converted into a temporary laboratory, and scratched myself sadly on the cycads leaves while examining the forthcoming fruits. The cycads are really wonderful – so tall, and curved and branched innumerable.
- August 4. I set off with my bicycle for a fossil-insect hunt in Shiobara. Fossil insects are shy and scarce, and I am the first to stalk them here, so I came with a double lot of patience.
- August 5. I hunted fossil insects morning and afternoon, and got a haul better than I might have expected.
- August 13. I set to Yejiri to see the cycads again. I found quantities of cones, twenty- six huge things, a foot and a half long, on one tree! The smell of these cones is very strong, like pineapple and cake fermented together.

These entries show her devotion to her research and her sheer determination in overcoming physical obstacles.³³ She was also acutely aware of being the first woman scientist from the West to have worked at the Institute.

When Marie studied in Munich she took advantage of the theatre and similarly in Japan she studied the classical Japanese *No* plays with their

strict rules of literary structure. They dated from the early fourteenth and fifteenth centuries and Marie read them in a similar way to her mother's reading of Shakespeare. Marie stressed the subtleties of the verses: 'Almost every word carries more than its face value, and has been enriched by centuries of usage in innumerable poetical and traditional connections.' In 1913 Marie presented four plays with the translations by Professor Joji Sakurai.

Whilst other people have used discretion in the breakdown of personal and private relationships Marie sought consolation by publically drawing on the style of Japanese literature. Although supposedly fictional, her book was a near factual record of her fraught relationship with Kenjiro Fujii. Presumably she found the composing of *Love Letters of a Japanese. Correspondence between Mertyl Meredith and Kenrio Watanbe* to be cathartic.³⁴ This collection of letters was supposedly edited by G.N. Mortlake but in fact they were written and edited by Marie herself. At the start of the book she states that the letters had not been corrected or altered and the situation described in the book was true. Marie's alter ego was Mertyl Meredith, 'a girl with Mertyl's character could only be won through the gates of her intellectual and spiritual citadel'. Kenjiro Fujii was transformed into Kenrio Watanbe, 'a Japanese man of middle age and attractive personality, able in his profession'. Like Kenjiro, Kenrio was married with a child. Marie quoted from actual incidents in her life such as being sent a box of flowers from him, being presented with a Japanese sword ring and given jade jewellery. She narrates how the affair ended but in this description her style descends into the ludicrous, 'His weak and ever-weakening body could not bear the strain of masculine desire.'³⁵ Understandably, Kenjiro was rumoured to be upset when he read this book and saw his private thoughts becoming public. In many ways the emotional descriptions in this book anticipate her later *Married Love*.

Marie left Japan on 24 January 1909 with a wounded love, significant fossil specimens and an elaborate oriental chest which now stands in the house of Mary Stopes-Roe. Marie realised her romantic relationship had ended but she was subsequently able to adopt a professional relationship with Kenjiro. The two scientists published a joint paper the next year on 'The studies and structure of Cretaceous plants' which was published by the Royal Society. Fourteen years later they corresponded in a formal manner and Marie sent him a generous telegram on his birthday, 'May the glow of immortal life burn beneath the snow-capped peak of Kenjiro seventy epochs.'³⁶

Marie's final palaeobotanical expedition was at the invitation of the Canadian Government to undertake a geological survey of Fern Lodges at St John, New Brunswick. Between 1910 and 1914 she tracked the reproductive lives of fossils which had long since ceased to exist. As a palaeobotanist she examined the area for traces of fossil plants in the Fern lodges which contained layers of sandstone and shale. She analysed the findings of previous scientists and visited the area to carry out her own field work. Amongst other species she found traces of gymnosperms and calamites. When Marie's work was concluded she prepared a short list of the species located by herself and other scientists as well as a series of photographic plates of the specimens.³⁷

In 2014 Carla Hustak controversially discusses Marie Stopes' research in Brunswick and concludes that 'Stopes tracking of plant sex was far from an innocent or apolitical invocation of kinship but inscribed sex as the factor that produced hierarchically ordered "races" of plants.'³⁸ Dr Carla Hustak argues that Marie was familiar with the evolutionary work of Charles Darwin and his cousin Francis Galton and so 'by considering how both plants and human as subject to the same techniques of controlled breeding, botanists could share common ground with birth controllers and eugenicists.'³⁹ She argues that in *Married Love* and *Wise Parenthood* Marie used a discussion of botanic metaphors to inform her treatment of human sexuality. Carla Hustak's arguments are thought-provoking but this book challenges how far we can extrapolate isolated phrases from the body of Marie's work to prove contemporary points.

Marie's profile was raised by her academic research and also by the publication of popular books for a non-specialist audience. In 1906 she wrote, *The Study of Plant Life for Young People* which ran to three editions and was reprinted again in 1934. This was followed in 1910 by *Ancient Plants* which was her first popular account of fossil plant study. Marie asserted that if people wanted to know and understand the vegetation around them they must study the history of ancient plants such as angiosperms, gymnosperms and cycads.⁴⁰ Her next popular work was *Botany: The Modern Study Plants* which addressed the central question of how plants came to be alive and how they lived.

Marie returned from Japan to the University of Manchester where she had a brief flirtation with Henry Bassett, who had been a fellow student at Munich, and a longer dalliance with Charlie Hewitt, an academic who was already engaged. Marie decided, in spite of her promotion at the University, that the Manchester climate was injurious to her health and so

returned to London. She then obtained a highly sought after research post in palaeobotany at UCL through the sponsorship of her mentor Professor Oliver.

Marie thus left political Manchester where Mrs Pankhurst had founded the Women's Social and Political Union in 1906. Marie, although sympathetic to women's suffrage, was not overinvolved in the campaigns, militant or non-militant. Neither did she directly take part in World War I by volunteering as a nurse or serving overseas as an ambulance driver. Marie unsuccessfully applied to join the Red Cross at the start of the World War I but did not pursue this course of action. She correctly considered her coal research as being an invaluable part of the war effort.

There is continuity in Marie's work and David Gelsthorpe's views on defining Marie's character have much to commend them. 'The skills she gained through becoming a pioneering woman in palaeobotany and dealing with officials such as the Japanese authorities, prepared her well in tackling the problems she came across later.'⁴¹ Marie eventually resigned her post at UCL in 1920 to concentrate on her other projects. Unfortunately, Marie's later work in sexual politics has come to overshadow her already considerable achievements in palaeobotany.⁴²

NOTES

1. British Library, Stopes Papers, Add MSS 58463.
2. Stopes, Marie, *The Study of Plant Life*. (London, 1906) p. 2.
3. Stopes, Marie, *Botany. The Study of Plant Life*. (London, 1919) p. 60.
4. British Library, Stopes Papers, Add MSS 58463.
5. British Library, Stopes Papers, Add MSS 54863.
6. Correspondence of Clothilde Von Wyss to Marie Stopes. British Library, Stopes Papers, Add MSS 58538.
7. June Rose describes Marie's academic journey through school to university in her chapter 'Scholarly Pursuits', *Marie Stopes*. (pp. 21–45). Ruth Hall, *Marie Stopes*, provides insights into Marie's academic career 'Birth of a Superior Brain' (pp. 15–34).
8. Hall, Lesley A., 'The Subject Is Obscene', *Women's History Review*, 2013, vol. 22, issue 2, p. 255.
9. Stopes, Marie, 'The Leaf -Structure of Cordaites', *New Physiologist*, 1903.
Stopes, Marie 'Epidermoidal Layer of Calamite Roots'. *Annals of Botany*, September 1903.
10. Maude, Aylmer, *Authorised Life*. (London, 1924) pp. 47–53.
11. Stopes-Roe, Harry and Scott, Ian, *Marie Stopes*. (London, 1970) p. 30.

12. Keith Briant, the early biographer of Marie Stopes, names the professor as Kuyiro in his translation from the Japanese, but he is referred to as Kenjiro by Marie's later biographers such as Ruth Hall and June Rose and this nomenclature is adopted.
13. Hall, Ruth, *Marie Stopes*. (London, 1976) p. 50.
14. University of Manchester Special Collections.
15. Eaton, P. and Warwick, M., *Marie Stopes. A Preliminary Checklist of Her Writings*. (London, 1977) p. 17.
16. Eaton, Peter and Warwick, Marilyn, *Marie Stopes*. (London, 1977) p. 17.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 18.
18. Stopes, Marie, 'A Note on Wounded Calamites', *Annals of Botany*, April 1907, vol. XXI, issue LXXXII.
19. University of Manchester Archives.
20. Gelsthorpe, David, *Geological Curators Group*. (2007) p. 376.
21. *Ibid.*, p. 377.
22. Stopes, Marie, *Ancient Plants*. (London, 1910) p. 99.
23. Postcards in personal collection of Clare Debenham.
24. Marie Stopes' letter written to Winnie Stopes. British Library, Stopes Papers, Add MSS 58455.
25. Maude, Aylmer, *Authorised Life of Marie Stopes*. (London, 1924) p. 59. Scott's signature is in the relevant Visitors' Book in the University of Manchester Archives.
26. Gelsthorpe, David, (2007) p. 377.
27. British Library, Stopes Papers, Add MSS 58463-56.
28. Maude, Aylmer, *Marie Stopes*. (London, 1924) p. 61.
29. Rowbotham, Sheila, *Rebel Crossings*. (London, 2016) p. 120.
30. Kenjiro Fuji. British Library, Stopes Papers Add MSS 58454 f.78.
31. These incidents appeared later in Marie's supposedly fictionalised *Love Letters of a Japanese*. (London, 1919).
32. Stopes, Marie, *A Journal from Japan*. (London, 1909).
33. *Ibid.*, p. 72.
34. Stopes, Marie (pseud, G.N. Mortlake), *Love Letters of a Japanese*. (London, 1919).
35. *Ibid.*, pp. 64–65, 34–347.
36. Hall, Ruth, *Marie Stopes*. p. 77.
37. Stopes, Marie, *The "Fern Lodges" Carboniferous flora of St. John, Brunswick*. (Ottawa, 1914) p. 11.
38. Husak, Carla, *Gender, Place and Culture*. 2014, vol. 21, issue 7, p. 889.
39. *Ibid.*, p. 894.
40. Stopes, Marie, *The Study of Plant Life of Young People*. (London, 1906).
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41. Gelsthorpe, David, (London, 2007) p. 379.
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CHAPTER 4

From *Married Love* to *Enduring Passion*

Abstract Marie's work changed direction and for her the personal became the political. A disastrous first marriage to Reginald Ruggles Gates, a Canadian geneticist, ended when she took the unusual step of successfully seeking an annulment. A lesser woman would have sought refuge in anonymity but Marie believed her experience should benefit humanity. She therefore wrote *Married Love* which had a great impact. This led to other books including *Letter to Working Mothers* and a discussion of physical love for the mature in *Enduring Passion*. She went on lecture tours, wrote plays (one banned), and produced a film *Maisie's Wedding*. Her published work created a revolution in the way sexual relations were viewed and changed the lives of both men and women.

Keywords Ruggles Gates • Marriage annulment • *Married Love* • Sexual revolution • *Enduring Passion*

The lover and the beloved must do what best serves them both and gives them the highest degree of mutual joy and power. Marie Stopes, *Married Love*¹

This chapter shows how Marie Stopes seized the challenge of being part of a sexual revolution. She changed from being a person known to a small circle of academics to one, upon entering a whole new field of work,

developed a mass audience. This new research shows how after her highly publicised marriage annulment, Marie was able to communicate new ways of thinking about sexual relations through a series of popular books, articles and plays. There is a certain bitter irony in the titles of Marie's books when applied to her own personal circumstances which certainly did not always include married love.

In 1910 Marie left Manchester and purchased Well Walk in Hampstead, near Charlotte Stopes' house, and she lived there with her sister Winnie. Marie's academic reputation had grown and she embarked on research into the carboniferous flora of New Brunswick at the request of the Canadian government. The precise dates are unclear but, according to biographer June Rose, Marie met the Canadian geneticist Reginald Ruggles Gates for the first time on 29 December 1910.² Her parents had met at a British Association for the Advancement of Science (BAAS) meeting and Marie was introduced to her future husband at a similar meeting of the American Association of Science Botanical at St Louis. After her experiences with Kenjiro Fujii Marie had enjoyed brief passionate relationships with both men and women, but she was not drawn to them in the same way as she was to Ruggles. After a whirlwind courtship he proposed to Marie on New Year's Eve and she almost immediately accepted Ruggles's offer of marriage. Keith Briant writes that in addition to their mutual interest in science Ruggles was physically attracted to Marie. It was a heady and dangerous atmosphere.³ Significantly, as will be later discussed in the chapter on Eugenics and Marie's objection to her future daughter-in-law, Ruggles Gates is photographed wearing spectacles.

In this letter penned by Marie on 11 February 1911 she talks excitedly to her younger sister Winnie about her forthcoming marriage and the accommodation of her house at Well Walk.

My dear kid

Though I can't be sure till I am actually married, I want that room for a man! A man who will be my husband before I sail, as I expect, if he stays as nice as he seems....Except that he has a stupid little nose, he seems absolutely perfect. I couldn't have made him better myself. He is a Canadian and a darling. Don't tell a soul. It is a dead secret. You see I am a sudden person and in the middle of the ceremony I might say no!⁴

Marie was married in Montreal on 18 March 1911 and she was carried away with the drama of the situation. Typically, for Marie's love of excitement, the marriage had to be a mystery. There was no obvious

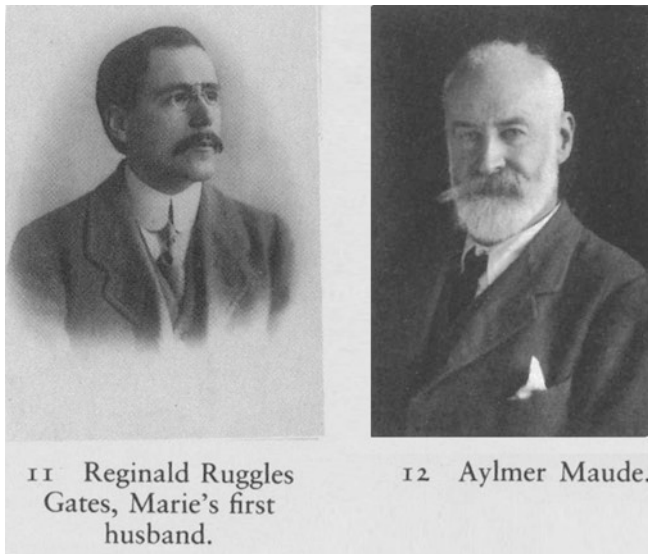


Fig. 4.1 Reginald Ruggles Gates and Aylmer Maude

reason why the couple could not have been married in England when her mother and sister could have attended. Indeed, Ruggles had wanted the wedding ceremony to be held in London. This omission of invitations to her family was surprising because when her mother eventually met Ruggles they related well. Ruggles respected Charlotte Stopes as a Shakespearean scholar. Marie and Ruggles Gates were married by a Methodist minister with two former admirers of Marie attending, Dr Helen McMurcy and Charlie Hewitt.

Marie returned to England with Ruggles and their marriage seemed to flourish in its first year. However, Ruggles encountered similar professional difficulties to that of Kenjiro Fujii. Both men were academically unrecognised in England whereas Marie was already feted as a successful published academic. This comparison was hard for these male academics to take. Ruggles had hoped to obtain an academic post in Britain but instead it was Marie who was awarded a prized post in palaeobotany by her mentor from University College London, Professor Oliver. Ruggles was reduced to lecturing medical students at St Thomas Hospital. Marie to some extent understood Ruggles' frustration. In early 1912 she anonymously funded a

series of lectures at Imperial College London, which she made certain Ruggles was chosen to present. No doubt Ruggles had his suspicions about the true identity of his generous benefactor but was content to go along with the charade.

Ruggles was initially pleased with his wife's popularity and charm, although he was surprised when Marie presented him with a bound copy of her supposedly fictionalised *Love Letters of a Japanese*: 'My reaction was one of mild shock but I accepted it as one of the minor disabilities of being married to a literary woman.'⁵ Little did he realise that his own marriage was destined to be given similar treatment by Marie in her novels and plays.

The romance of the marriage soon wore off. The couple had never got to know one another intimately prior to their wedding and soon principled differences became apparent. Ruggles was not happy with Marie's feminist views and opinions. He did not approve of Marie retaining her maiden name and he disliked her friends. He also distrusted Marie's support for the Women's Taxation Reform League. Ruggles was disappointed that Marie was not satisfied with being his wife and that Marie was developing her own academic career. He retaliated by trying to control Marie by such petty actions as forbidding her to buy a separate copy of *The Times*. Marie was dissatisfied with her husband who had not lived up to the ideal she had constructed. In particular she found sexual relations with him unsatisfactory because she later claimed that although there was lengthy foreplay the sex act was never completed.⁶

Marie had convinced herself that she was marrying an outstanding academic with a comfortable income. She was soon disabused about the latter and like her mother beforehand she was disappointed with her husband's limited finances. Ironically, after their relationship had ended Ruggles' academic career flourished as he later became a world-renown geneticist.

After only a year their marriage was in serious difficulties. In late 1912 the marriage exploded in a violent quarrel when Marie dramatically threatened to kill her husband and then herself. Marie left Ruggles only to return shortly, but the marriage had irretrievably broken down.⁷ As often happens the marriage eventually degenerated into squabbles about money which was one reason that Marie eventually decided to camp out on a Northumberland beach.⁸

Another person came to be involved in the marriage when in December 1912 Marie met Aylmer Maude at a dinner party. Aylmer Maude was married, with four sons and was twenty-two years older than Marie. He was distinguished looking and had a considerable literary reputation in London

as the biographer of Tolstoy. Marie was physically attracted to Aylmer and Aylmer Maude certainly found the young Marie attractive. He rapidly became her confidante and was able help her with the publication of books such as *Ancient Plants* and more significantly *Love Letters of a Japanese*. Aylmer needed lodgings in London and surprisingly Ruggles agreed to the older man moving into Well Walk. Aylmer helped their finances by paying £25 a month for bed and breakfast. After Ruggles moved out of the house Aylmer lodged there again. The complete breakdown of Marie and Ruggles' marriage is illustrated by this dispute about finances. In July 1913 Marie wrote a letter rejecting Ruggles request for payment. 'In reply to your request for me to send you money for the house I can only return a refusal. You prevented me living peaceably there.'⁹

Aylmer Maude does not mention this period in his biography of Marie Stopes but it was true that Marie wrote to Maude in effusive terms addressing him as 'Dearest'. This letter by Marie to Aylmer of November 1913, quoted by Keith Briant, is typical of her outpourings to this older man.

My Beloved. You are parted from me, and you are lonely, oppressed by burdens innumerable. Beloved, as I come to you, nor encircle with love strong enough to defend you from all evil, and strengthen you with every virtue, I send you my blessing.¹⁰

Ruggles was later to angrily accuse Marie of adultery with Aylmer Maude but there is no evidence of a physical relationship. Though Marie was attracted and flattered by the older man she realised the age difference was too great for a deep relationship. Eventually in 1917 Marie recognised her infatuation for Aylmer had burnt itself out, 'I'm really quite fond of you, but fondness isn't love as I could love, Yours with a kiss, Marie.'¹¹ Nevertheless, Marie kept and treasured Aylmer's letters right to her death. Marie's son Harry told me that he remembered, as a young boy, that the white-haired Aylmer was introduced to him as 'Grandpa'.

Marie was determined to end her marriage to Ruggles Gates but this proved to be difficult. Biographer June Rose has traced a letter dated 13 September 1913 from a Canadian legal firm, Brown, Montgomery & McMichael of Montreal which informed Marie that divorce in Canada could only be obtained through an Act of Parliament and this could be cripplingly expensive.¹² Marie made further enquiries through her London solicitors and was informed that divorce could only be granted in Canada in respect of her husband's adultery and this would cost between \$1200

and \$1500 dollars. Marie's solicitors were also unhelpful in her quest to end her marriage through the English legal system.

One solution to ending this unhappy marriage was for Ruggles to let Marie divorce him for alleged adultery. It was quite common for upper-class men, in order to end an unhappy marriage, to hire a hotel room and then pre-arrange with a private detective to take compromising photos. This could provide evidence in Court for divorce on the grounds of adultery. Ruggles later claimed that this course of action was suggested to him by Marie but he would not entertain such a deception because of his strict religious principles.

Marie, ever the academic, proceeded to carry out research at the British Museum into English law and the physiology of reproduction. No doubt Marie's research at the British Museum in the locked cupboard of sexual secrets would have uncovered the famous case of Effie Gray who in 1854 cited 'incurable impotency' as a way of ending her marriage to the celebrated artist John Ruskin. The next year Effie married fellow artist Millais and they went on to have eight children.

Marie's research led her to discover that rather than citing for divorce, she could have her marriage annulled. She took the unusual step of filing her Nullity Petition in the Probate, Divorce and Admiralty Division of the High Court of Justice. This was heard, on 8 May 1916, two years after she had instituted proceedings. Clause 3 of her petition was issued in the name of Marie Carmichael Gates, but with the insistence of being recognised as Marie Carmichael Stopes. Her grounds for annulment were cited as: 'Reginald Ruggles Gates was at the time of the said marriage incapable of consummating the said marriage and such incapacity is incurable.' Aylmer Maude quotes Marie in his biography as saying Ruggles was a passionate lover but an incomplete husband.¹³

Marie was questioned in Court about the lack of consummation of her marriage.¹⁴

Q. Mr Justice Shearman With regard to your husband's part did it ever get rigid at all?

A. On hundreds of occasions on which we had, what I thought were relations, I only remember three occasions on which it was partially rigid, and then it was never effectively rigid.

Q. He had made many attempts?

A. Yes.

Q. And he never succeeded in penetrating your private parts?

A. No.

Marie must have been aware that the case would personally humiliate Ruggles Gates and damage his reputation. She was successful in obtaining her annulment but at a great personal reputational cost to him.

As is common in marital disputes, Ruggles and Marie had different views on the failure of their marriage. Ruggles did not contest the marriage annulment, perhaps this was because he had more pressing concerns. In 1917 Ruggles volunteered to serve in World War I as an instructor aerial gunner in the Royal Flying Corp. Eventually Ruggles responded to Marie's accusations and at the end of his life he provided personal evidence to argue his case. In 1962 his widow deposited his frank statement in the British Library: 'I was probably clumsy at first through lack of experience, but we were soon having full intercourse frequently enough to satisfy a normal woman.' Ruggles later claimed that Marie taunted him about his sexual performance.¹⁵ He generously praised Keith Briant's 1962 biography of Marie although it presented a rather unflattering picture of himself. Ruggles regarded the book's shortcomings as a result of Briant's enforced reliance on Marie's version of events and bitterly remarked: 'You may not know that for over thirty years the friends of Marie Stopes have been working to make it appear that she descended from Heaven.'¹⁶

In the Ruggles Gates archive at the British Library there is a medical certificate of fertility approved when he was sixty-four, although this does not address the issue of alleged impotence in his marriage to Marie. Ruggles went on to marry Jane Williams, but this marriage was dissolved in 1929. Significantly there were no children; indeed none of his marriages resulted in children. Eventually he married the social scientist Laura Green in 1955 who gave an archive of his papers to the British Library on 27 May 1962. Marie and Ruggles continued to mix in the same academic circles which caused difficulties for both of them. Ruggles Gates went on to have an illustrious academic career and was eventually given a Chair in Biology at Kings College University of London. As a result of the annulment, well-publicised in the press, Ruggles' academic friends mistrusted Marie for her public humiliation of her former husband and she was shunned by them.

It is possible that Marie, as on other occasions, embellished the facts of her marriage for her own purposes. Marie did not easily obtain the certificate of virginity as she had to approach several doctors before she found one sympathetic enough to give her the necessary certificate. Eventually Dr Taylor on 6 May 1914 gave her a certificate of qualified virginity which stated that 'in my opinion there is evidence from the condition of the

hymen that there it had not been penetration by a normal male organ'. Marie claimed that he said she had used a douche on medical advice when abroad and this would account for any tears in the hymen.¹⁷

However, even more surprising is her statement to the court which claimed that she did not realise that her husband's penis should have been erect and 'not so limp as he struggled to enter that he pushed it in with his finger'. Marie later repeated this account of her marriage to her friend Mary Stocks. They were having lunch in a cafe and quickly there came a hushed silence to be broken by the words Marie uttered, 'My dear, would you believe it! After three years of married life I was still a virgin!'¹⁸ Her explanation given to her friends for not recognising that something was drastically wrong in her marriage is not entirely plausible. This was not some innocent young girl talking but a mature woman with a first class honours degree in biological science, two doctorates and she was also a woman who had lectured medical students. Admittedly Marie's research in palaeobotany into the sexual reproduction of plants did not have any direct relevance to twentieth century sexual relations between men and women, but she was a highly educated woman in the discipline of Biology

In 1918 Marie published her ground-breaking book *Married Love. A New Contribution to the Solution of Sex Difficulties*. This can be read in at least four ways: as an intensely personal account of her frustrations in sexual experience; a celebration of a new sexual age; an exploration of the sexual rights of women; and a scientific treatise. It contains explicit sexual advice and in an article published in the influential *British Medical Journal* Wendy Moore argued that *Married Love* brought the joy of sex to millions for the first time. She argues that in plain English with simple diagrams, Marie's book advocated foreplay, championed mutual orgasm and recommended 'spacing of children'.¹⁹

Probably Marie would not have been moved to write *Married Love* if her own marriage had not failed so publicly. 'In my own marriage I paid such a terrible price for sex-ignorance that I feel that knowledge gained at such a cost should be placed at the service of humanity.'²⁰ Most women would have retreated into anonymity after salacious details of their sex lives were revealed to the general public but Marie once again found solace in her writing. After her relationship with Kenjiro ended Marie wrote a thinly disguised fictional work, *Love Letters of a Japanese*. Marie considered presenting *Married Love* as a work of fiction but decided against this

approach.²¹ Instead, as a result of reading letters responding to her widely reported case, she responded with a comprehensive factual book.

There is one obvious objection to Marie's treatise on sexuality: supposedly she had never experienced sexual relations either in marriage or outside it. She cleverly overcame this obstacle by quoting in her book from established writers on sexual topics such as Havelock Ellis and Edward Carpenter who held that conjugal love was an art. Marie also referenced, amongst others, the following writers: Ellen Key, an English writer at the turn of the century; Charlotte Gilchrist Perkins, a radical feminist; and the Swiss Professor August Fogel.

Historian Lucy Worsley explains in her television documentary, 'Marie had rewritten the rules of romance.'²² Indeed the first chapter of her *Married Love* is entitled 'The Heart's Desire' and the first sentence asserts 'Every heart desires a mate.'²³ *Married Love* continues as a sexually explicit outpouring:

From the body of the loved one's simple, sweetly coloured flesh, which our immemorial creature instincts urge us to desire, there springs not only the bodily wonder of a new bodily life, but also the enlargement of the horizon of human sympathy, and the glow of spiritual understanding which a solitary soul could never have attained alone.²⁴

Ross McKibbin rightly regards *Married Love* as a sexual narrative which guides the reader, currently in ignorance, to obtaining the fulfilment of sexual knowledge.²⁵ McKibbin correctly asserts that it was a book whose time had come. In 1927 the author Harold Begbie wrote a lyrical defence of Marie's book: 'Her aim may be defined in the simple words *human happiness*. The condition of things she would abolish may be defined in equally simple words, human misery. And the one weapon she employs for both purposes is *knowledge*.'

Married Love, published just after the end of World War I in the spirit of Modernism, appealed to women who wanted a more equal sexual satisfaction in marriage and to their intelligent, sensitive, male partners who wished to provide this. The book legitimises women's sexual feelings and desires and in the chapter entitled 'Woman's contrariness' Marie expanded on sex differences,

Men have realised that much of the charm of life lies in sex-differences between men and women; so they have snatched at the easy theory that

women differ from themselves by being capricious. Moreover, by attributing to mere capriciousness the coldness which at times comes over the most ardent woman, man was unconsciously justifying himself for at *any* one time coercing her to suit himself.²⁶

Dr Lesley Hall, Emeritus Research Fellow at the Wellcome Library, rightly expresses *Married Love's* attraction: 'Stopes gave her readers a language to talk about things that they had not been able to articulate. She gave them a language that felt, clean, beautiful, scientific.'²⁷

Marie addressed the sexual difficulties of both women and men. Surprisingly from someone who claimed to be a virgin Marie provides an accurate description of the difficulties occasioned by the first attempt at intercourse on the bridal night. She vividly describes the discomfort and bleeding experienced by the new bride. However, in *Married Love* Marie also stresses that the husband needed support.

In some recent years some young women expect far more sex union than a husband's physique can stand. The young wife selfishly and irrationally taunts and wounds him so the marriage becomes a failure instead of the success it might have been.

This advice was ironic given that Ruggles claimed Marie had taunted him over the years about his sexual performance.

Marie's style in *Married Love* was often more literary than scientific but this chimed with the times. Marie's prose was by twenty-first century taste overblown but then arguably so is the literary style of D. H. Lawrence in his acclaimed novels. This is illustrated by the following extracts from *Lady Chatterly's Lover* which describes the sexual relationship between the gamekeeper Mellors and Lady Connie.

And this time the sharp ecstasy of her passion did not overcome her; she lay with her hands inert on his striving body, and do what she might her spirit seemed to look on from the top of her head...Yes, this was love, this ridiculous bouncing of buttocks, and the wilting of the poor, insignificant penis.²⁸

Later in the novel Connie reflects on her sexual experiences:

She felt, now, she had come to the real bed-rock of her nature and was essentially shameless. She was her sensual self, naked and unashamed. She felt a triumph, almost a vain glory. So! That was how it was! That was life!

That was how oneself really was. There was nothing left to disguise or be ashamed of. She shared her ultimate nakedness with a man, another being.²⁹

Marie's literary style had the advantages of making the book acceptable as a work of art rather than pornography.

Marie, with her scientific training intended *Married Love* to have a scientific basis, for instance by presenting an anatomically correct description of an erection.

The enlargement of the penis is not at all due to the presence of actual sperm, but is due to the effects of the nervous reaction on the blood-vessels, leading to the filling, principally of the veins and much less to arteries. As the blood enters but does not leave the penis, the venous cavities fill up with venous blood until the whole is rigid. When rigid this organ is able to penetrate the female entrance.³⁰

Her descriptions of the sexual act are detailed and indeed, given the problems that D.H. Lawrence had over censorship, it is remarkable they were ever permitted to be published.

Professor Lorna Doan, University of Manchester, points out that Marie remained a scientist as well as a lyrical author. At the same time as writing *Married Love*, Marie gathered data to support her thesis regarding the rhythmic regularity of sexual desire and drew on her own experience to be a research subject. Over each month for two years she recorded in statistical tables and graphs the idea of periodicity. She had seen this approach in the writings of the sexologist Havelock Ellis. Marie's biometrical work in researching human sexuality helped to highlight sexual desire in women as being normal rather than exceptional. Professor Doan interestingly argues that Marie regarded sexual desire as being in accord with the rhythms of the natural world with which she was familiar as a palaeobotanist.³¹

Marie went on to write a series of books on women's sexual freedom which included freedom from unwanted pregnancies. She wrote at a phenomenal rate, completing *Wise Parenthood* just six months after finishing *Married Love*. It was produced as the sequel to *Married Love* and indeed the first part of the book contains references to her earlier work. She makes the following point about her treatment of the subject

The ethical, and romantic, the physiological, the frankly practical and economic aspects, and the distantly ramifying results of the various methods, are all of vital importance and are essentially interwoven.³²

Marie argues that an increasing number of responsible parents are using some form of contraception but it is important that they are informed about the most effective methods. Therefore Marie devotes Chapter IV to a discussion of her recommended methods and the following chapter to criticising other popular methods such as the use of the sheath (which prevents seminal fluid reaching the woman) and coitus interruptus. Marie continued to anger the Church leaders by claiming that it was possible to enjoy sex without the need for procreation.

Marie catered for a wide range of audiences and in her following books she expanded the theme of birth control as an evangelist. Marie significantly realised that *Wise Parenthood*, though popular with middle-class women was not reaching those most in need—working-class mothers. She therefore writes *A Letter to Working Mothers* in 1919. This is written in a cheaper pamphlet format and published by her Mothers' Clinic for Constructive Birth Control. It is only fifteen pages long and clearly subtitled, *On How to Have Healthy Children and Avoid Weakening Pregnancies* and simply presents helpful factual information. My interviewee, Mrs Elsie Plant from Stockport, had bought an early copy of this book.

Marie returns to her middle-class audience with *Radiant Motherhood* published in 1920. The uplifting subtitle is *A Book for Those Who are Creating the Future*. She tries to shock her readers, for instance by posing the question in Chapter Twenty, 'Why do poor slum mothers buy more coffins than do the same number of rich women?' She was later to return to this theme in her plays.

Marie was eclectic in her writings. *Contraception. Its Theory History and Practice* was written in 1924 supposedly for the medical profession, with Prefaces by learned medical men but Marie knew it would also be consulted by lay people searching for factual information.³³ By this time she was able to draw on information from her own clinic. As well as indicating the history of contraception in *Contraception* Chapters V and VI, Marie presents the current various contraceptive methods and analyses their efficacy. Chapter VI provides illustrations of various rubber cups with a justification for recommending her own designed diaphragm. Throughout this book Marie compares illustrative cases of her treatments to the less successful methods of other birth control pioneers.

Marie was not just concerned with preventing procreation but with the enjoyment of sexual relations throughout life. *Enduring Passion*, published in 1928, was written by the more mature Marie. Her opening sentence asserts that every true lover desires that love shall endure. The book

is a tribute to the older lover and Marie claims that she is developing the earlier themes of *Married Love*. Marie, as well as providing anatomical information, draws on correspondence to provide case studies to illustrate the themes of her chapters. She examines the supposed excessive sex drive in men and women and interestingly she quotes a Japanese professor of biology who passed on to her an old Japanese proverb, that as the years of marriage pass the woman wants more and more, and the man is less able to give what he has taught her to demand. She encourages sexual relations through all ages and her approach in this book remains lyrical.

Marie, throughout her own life, as seen in this book's conclusion, adhered to the book's philosophy and continued to explore new sexual relationships when over seventy years old. *Marriage in My Time*, written in 1931, takes a comprehensive view of marriage discussing married women's names, marriage and money as well as her usual theme of the marriage bed. In 1936 she published *Change of Life in Men and Women* which discusses physiological factors in sexual relationships in older partners.

Marie did not just confine herself to writing books, but used a variety of print media to spread her message. She regularly wrote articles for popular magazines such as *John Bull*, *Women's Pictorial* and *Sunday Express* which were enthusiastically handed round by their readers. However, even the academic, Marie also produced technical papers for the medical profession on subjects such as coital interlocking.

As often happens in the work of Marie Stopes the line between fact and fiction is blurred and she uses fiction to dramatise real-life events. The protagonists in the annulment drama would have recognised themselves in her 1926 play *Vectia*, which fortunately for all concerned was banned by the Lord Chamberlain on the grounds that its theme of male sexual impotence was unsuitable for public performance. The main characters were only thinly disguised versions of those in real life. Vectia Rees (Marie), a delightful English girl, is married to William (Ruggles), thin and ascetic. Vectia longs for a baby but although she creates a sculpture of a cherub, she remains childless. It is not until her barrister friend Heron (Aylmer Maude) her next door neighbour, virile and attractive, knocks on the wall and comes round that she realises that after three years of marriage her husband was still impotent. Heron obligingly draws a diagram of sex organs.

When *Vectia* was banned Marie quickly penned a replacement, *Our Ostriches*, which was staged at the Royal Court Theatre. It proved to be extremely popular and ran for three months. The upper-class heroine,

Miss Evadne Carrillon (Marie Stopes in disguise) tries to convert the Birth Rate Commission to adopt a policy of birth control, but only one of the Ostriches, Dr Verro Hodges, recognises the solution to the problem. The play shows Evadne's shock after her visit to an overcrowded tenement filled with sick children who their impoverished parents could not support. Evadne then ends her engagement in favour of spreading the birth control message and forms a relationship with an idealistic medical officer of health.

It was not only plays that Marie authored—she also ventured into film. Marie's film, *Maisie's Marriage*, mostly escaped the Lord Chamberlain's censorship. In the film Maisie runs away from home and ends up under the care of Mrs Sterling who offers to train her as an under-parlour maid. Her mistress explains to Maisie that rearing children was like growing roses, they needed to be cared for and not allowed to grow wild. Professor Stephanie Green convincingly argues that Marie strove to provide a socially acceptable motivation for her heroine's sexual desires.³⁴

Although she was writing popular books and plays on sex problems Marie still considered herself an academic scientist. The Bibliography at the back of her fifth edition of *Enduring Love* lists her extensive published research on coal as well as the best-selling *Married Love*.³⁵

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Birth Control: The Start of Marie Stopes' Campaign

Abstract The early years of Marie's second marriage to Humphrey Verdon Roe, are described. The birth of her son Harry and her relationship with him are analysed. The archives show she received numerous requests for birth control advice resulting from the publication of *Married Love*. Marie met American birth controller Margaret Sanger. Marie and Humphrey, who was a birth control advocate before meeting Marie, then organised an influential public meeting in the Queens Hall and successfully approached public figures including suffragette Lady Constance Lytton. The couple founded the co-ordinating organisation Constructive Birth Control and Racial Progress and started publication of *The Birth Control News* of which Marie was editor.

Keywords Humphrey Verdon Roe • Birth of Harry Stopes-Roe • American birth controller Margaret Sanger • Queen's Hall Meeting • Formation of Society for Constructive Birth Control and Racial Progress • Lady Constance Lytton • Founding of *The Birth Control News*

*You may certainly use my name as a patron for the 'Mother's Clinic'.*¹ Lady Constance Lytton, former militant suffragette

As a result of the public interest in the sexual activity described in *Married Love* Marie's attention came to be focused on how to prevent

unwanted pregnancies. This chapter describes how she made birth control a political campaign by founding the organisation Campaign for Birth Control and Racial Progress, starting a magazine *The Birth Control News*, holding public meetings and cultivating influential supporters such as Lady Constance Lytton.

The publication of *Married Love* led romantically to Marie's second marriage to a committed birth control supporter. After completion of the draft of *Married Love* Marie could not find any publisher brave enough to publish this book. Understandably her first choice of Blackie and Son, who had published her academic books, refused *Married Love* for publication, tactfully saying it was outside their specialism. However, Marie continued to be optimistic and asked her literary friends for advice on publication. Eventually the small publishing house of A.C. Fifield agreed to consider it for publication and Dr Binnie Dunlop, Secretary of the Malthusian League which was concerned with population issues, recommended a backer who would invest £100 in *Married Love's* publication. This backer was Humphrey Roe, who with his brother Alliot Roe, had started their aircraft manufacturing business AVRO on 1 January 1910 at Brownsfield Mill, Great Ancoats Street, Manchester.

Humphrey Roe's interest in birth control was long-standing and he had been involved with birth control projects long before he met Marie. He had been extremely impressed when he observed the plight of working-class families in Manchester and so wanted to help them by endowing a birth control clinic in St Mary's Hospital, Manchester for £1000 a year or £12,000 if he died serving in World War I. It distressed Humphrey that this offer was refused because supposedly the hospital was fearful of offending their other supporters by taking this controversial action.²

Marie met Humphrey when he was on leave from the Western Front during World War I. He was handsome, charming and principled, flew his own light aircraft and understandably Marie was instantly attracted to him. As his son Harry wrote about his father: 'He had long supported female emancipation and the need for female fulfilment.'³ Unlike her first husband Ruggles Gates, Humphrey had no objection to Marie retaining her maiden name on marriage and respected her feminist views. The fact that Humphrey was already engaged to Ethel Burgess was just another obstacle to be swept away by Marie. They both visited Ethel, who initially opposed the ending of her engagement but within six months Marie and Humphrey were married. This public ceremony was conducted by the Bishop of Birmingham and the bride was given away by her close friend

Aylmer Maude, who no doubt had mixed feelings about his role. The best man was Dr Binnie Dunlop who had introduced the couple.

The wedding photographs show Humphrey handsome in uniform and Marie resplendent in a virginal cream lace wedding dress. The whole ceremony at St Margaret's, Westminster had been stage-managed with carefully invited guests, and for this marriage her mother was present, along with members of the Malthusian Society. The wedding ceremony was another of Marie's inventions as the couple had in fact married four weeks previously but Marie had a fluid relationship with the truth.⁴ Their earlier marriage was allegedly because Humphrey was serving in the Royal Air Force during World War I and had an uncertain future.

It is ironic that Marie, who had disliked her time in Manchester when lecturing at the University, should find herself with ties to that city again. Humphrey had strong business interests in Manchester and many of his letters to her were posted from Manchester addresses. It is obvious that it was Humphrey rather than Marie who placed the announcement of their forthcoming wedding in the *Manchester Evening News* on 16 May 1918. Their engagement announcement only appeared the next month in the *Manchester Guardian*.

The couple's letters from this period, archived in the Marie Stopes Papers British Library Collection, show a couple very much in love. She calls him 'Darling husband' with the nickname 'Tiger'. By 9 March 1920 she was calling him 'Precious lover'. In turn Humphrey addresses Marie as 'Dearest Wood Nymph; Dearest Dream; My darling little wife'. The content of the letters is also what you would expect between two people emotionally attached to one another. Humphrey was always concerned to support Marie and continued to trace the progress of *Married Love* which he must have given to interested parties to review. Humphrey writes to Marie in 1918 that 'In this week's *Aerospace*, page 912, a column is given to *Married Love*, but I didn't think it very good.'

This photographic image of Marie with her new husband offers confirmation of her as being very much the 'new woman' of the 1920s in the age of Modernism. Marie is depicted as being up to date with the latest developments and trends.⁵ Marie poses with Humphrey beside his private plane and, being a modern woman, wearing trousers instead of the conventional dress or skirt.

Marie was committed to helping couples plan and space their families so it is another irony that she herself had difficulty in conceiving. Marie was thirty-eight when she first became pregnant. She chose to go into a



The wedding in St. Margaret's, Westminster of Marie Stopes and Humphrey Roe in June 1918. They had, in fact, been married in a Registry Office a month before their church wedding.

Fig. 5.1 The public marriage ceremony in June 1918 of the wedding of Marie Carmichael Stopes to Humphrey Verdon Roe

nursing home in Teddington, Surrey for the birth but tragically the baby was stillborn. Marie blamed the doctors for not letting her give birth in her desired position and the medical men in turn incorrectly hinted at syphilis. The parents were united in their grief and carried out some of the therapeutic processes which are recommended today for grieving parents. Humphrey had a photograph taken of their baby lying on his back dressed



Fig. 5.2 Marie, as a 'new woman', and Humphrey, on holiday

in white baby clothes. He wrote on the reverse of the photograph, 'Henry Verdon, 12.15 a.m. 17 July 1919, died just before birth, photograph taken at 12 noon the same day....would have been born alive but for the interference of the doctor.'⁶ Charlotte was surprisingly sympathetic to her daughter and suggested naming the baby as a way of managing grief and so on her advice Henry was named after Marie's beloved father.

It took another four years for Marie to become pregnant again at the age of forty-two. Given her difficult obstetric history it is understandable that she would be overprotective of this baby. Harry Stopes-Roe was born on 27 March 1924 by caesarean section and weighed in at eight and three quarter pounds. *The Times*, probably because of Marie's notoriety, refused to carry the Birth Announcement, but there were interviews published in the *Daily Sketch* and *Daily Express*.

Marie was excessively proud of her baby who she claimed exhibited exceptional intelligence and curiosity. She claimed that Harry reached his physical milestones far in advance of his years and was verbally gifted. When Harry was five years old Marie wrote to Humphrey that 'He is looking celestially beautiful and talks much of God. The angels come with no footsteps.'⁷ His food had to be carefully chosen and his clothes conducive to healthy living. Mary Stopes-Roe recalls on her first visit that because of his shapeless clothes they could not be sure whether he was a boy or girl.⁸

A succession of boy ‘companions’ were selected for Harry by Marie, but she believed that none of them were of a high enough standard for him and against his wishes, dismissed them one-by-one. As an adult Harry became his own man, making positive decisions as to his friends and marriage.

Marie made the momentous step from writing revolutionary books on sexuality to becoming a practical birth control activist. Her practical birth control campaign was a surprising, if logical, development from her previous work with *Married Love* which only had a passing reference to birth control. Marie’s change of direction was again with the encouragement of her husband Humphrey. As well as providing emotional support for Marie he gave her practical help with financial backing, so enabling her to hold public meetings. Significantly, at all her early birth control meetings he was billed on the programme as Councillor H.V. Roe and took an active part in the organisation of events, often chairing meetings. However, in later years Marie appeared to conveniently overlook Humphrey’s early financial and emotional support.

Marie had contact with overseas birth control pioneers, for instance meeting Margaret Sanger, the American birth control activist in 1915. Margaret was a former nurse from New York and indeed was the first to coin the term ‘birth control’. Margaret Sanger writes in her autobiography *My Fight* about her early meeting with Marie Stopes and initially the two women were friends.

When Dr Stopes wrote her book *Married Love* it was not her intention to enter the campaign for birth control. It was sex knowledge of a general kind she wished to impart. It took but the slightest reference in her book to the need for contraception to push her into the front ranks of the battle, where she must have been much surprised to have found herself.⁹

On 14 September 1915 Marie wrote to the US authorities to support Margaret who was being threatened with prosecution under the Comstock Laws: ‘Mrs Margaret Sanger is known to me as a noble-minded, public-spirited woman who has run up against the worst form of “comstock-ery”.’¹⁰ Although the two women were later to fall out as being ‘unfriendly rivals’, there is no doubt Marie was initially influenced by Margaret’s birth control achievements.

Marie was also aware of the work of Dr Aletta Jacobs who had opened, what is now recognised, as the world’s first contraceptive clinic in

Amsterdam, Holland – hence the term ‘Dutch cap’ to describe this rubber contraceptive diaphragm.

Marie opened her first birth control clinic quietly in London on 17 March 1921, described in the next chapter. However, she soon realised she needed to create alliances in her new birth control endeavour and indeed her later enterprise in Belfast failed partly because there was not this support. Marie unsuccessfully approached Lloyd George, the then British Prime Minister, for his support. Although he was unable to provide this, he made the sensible suggestion that Marie should organise a public meeting to make the subject visible and respectable. Thus she took the gamble of hiring the Queen’s Hall in London for a meeting on 31 May 1921. The Hall seated 2000 people and if only a few supporters attended it could have been an enormous embarrassment for her. However, by the time the meeting began all the seats were occupied and there were even people standing. According to an eye-witness there was a packed crowd of ‘quite ordinary looking people’.¹¹

The Chairman, the Rt. Hon. G.H. Roberts, in his introductory remarks, made the point that he wanted women from his own class to have access to the same knowledge as the well-to-do. He was followed by Dr Jane Hawthorne, the Harley Street doctor who worked with Marie. Dr Hawthorne provided examples of maternity cases from her own practice, for instance citing the case of a thirty-nine year-old woman with seventeen children, nine of whom died. Dr Killick Millard, the Medical Officer of Health for Leicester, said he had been moved by the excessive fertility and frequent child-bearing among the poor.

Humphrey Roe then asserted that he and his wife, Marie Stopes, had come to the same conclusions about family limitation, he as a businessman in Manchester and she through her scientific knowledge.¹² Marie’s speech was the climax of the evening and much longer than the others. Marie declaimed that she wanted to found clinics to provide clean wholesome knowledge, to replace the miserable half knowledge that persisted. She stressed that birth control did not just mean contraception but bringing into the world healthy happy babies. The Labour Party leader J. H. Clynes was amongst those in the audience and he later remarked on the ‘spiritual fire’ generated by the meeting and the desire for action. Significantly Charlotte, Marie’s mother, was in the front row to give her daughter support.

The meeting was deemed a great success and led to the formation on 16 August 1921 of the Society for Constructive Birth Control and Racial

Progress (CBC) with herself as President and her husband Humphrey Roe as Secretary. H.G. Wells was appointed as one of the Vice-Presidents along with Aylmer Maude. Marie stressed it was a pro-baby organisation, 'babies in the right place'. Humphrey was initially to take a prominent role speaking at CBC meetings.

Important women were approached by Marie and the CBC notepaper lists the great and the good as supporters. She was not able to obtain the support of Queen Alexandra but later was to include the Duke of Windsor, later king of England, amongst her supporters.

Famous personalities on the General Executive Committee included Vera Brittain, already a well-known feminist pacifist writer and future author of *Testament of Youth*. Vera Brittain was impressed by Marie, believing her to be a confident and dauntless founder and that her crusade 'was one of the soundest hopes for the liberation of women from traditional restrictions and burdens'.¹³

Although originally drawing most of its members from London, in later years the Society's membership became more geographically diverse. It held monthly meetings and social events and amongst its supporters was the popular novelist Angela Brazil, famous for her school-girl stories which were popular with young girls for generations.

Marie recognised the importance of including well-known members of the suffrage campaign when certain classes of women were enfranchised in 1918. She had been a member of the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU) but, although her mother was an enthusiastic suffragist, Marie had not taken a prominent part in the suffrage campaign despite being supportive of their ideals. However, she realised the tactical advantage of linking the two campaigns. She successfully approached prominent suffragists who importantly regarded birth control as a continuation of the struggle for women's rights. Thus prominent figures listed on the CBC notepaper included Mrs Pethick Lawrence and Rev. Maude Royden who were both leading suffragists.

Marie scored a tactical triumph in enlisting the support of Constance, Lady Lytton who had been a high-profile suffragette.¹⁴ Lady Lytton's aristocratic background would have appealed to Marie but also important was Lady Lytton's connection with working-class women by identifying with them in prison. As a protest imprisoned suffragettes refused food and were then brutally fed with liquids through a tube. At first Lady Lytton was arrested but because she was aristocracy she was not force-fed like working-class women. Therefore, Lady Lytton had her hair cut off

and purposively disguised herself as a working woman, Jane Warton, so as not to be given preferential treatment. In consequence, she repeatedly underwent the torture of force-feeding. This permanently damaged her health but her actions were widely publicised by the WSPU and earned her the friendship of Mrs Pankhurst and her family. Lady Lytton became a suffragette icon.

Marie, who had not previously known her, presumptuously contacted Lady Lytton regarding her new birth control clinic in Holloway. Marie drew attention to the fact that it was near the women's prison where Constance had been incarcerated. Lady Lytton was most encouraging and generously agreed, as shown in the quotation at this chapter heading, that Marie could use her name as a patron for the Mother's Clinic.¹⁴ As a single childless woman this was a courageous decision by Lady Lytton. She modestly wrote to Marie, 'I am a spinster without children and not the sort to do much use.'¹⁵ Lady Lytton became committed to the birth control movement regarding it as a way of allowing women to take control of their lives. She was not well enough to attend the 1921 Queen's Hall meeting but later became a Vice-President of Marie's Society for Constructive Birth Control and Racial Progress, lending her prestigious name to the new organisation.

As a result of this correspondence with Marie, Lady Lytton was keen to visit the Mothers' Clinic although she explained she could only walk a few steps. On 13 January 1923 she at last visited the clinic and then joyfully wrote to Marie, 'It was a total revelation seeing you and that ideal little clinic. As I had hoped I got wonderfully more from seeing you for five minutes, than one could from letters.'¹⁶ Lady Lytton continued to support the Clinic, writing on 24 February 1923, 'If there is anything more I can do to help you, call on me.'¹⁷ She intended to write an article for Marie on the birth control clinic but was never well enough to do so. Lady Lytton tragically died later that year.¹⁸

Besides holding public meetings throughout the country Marie was keen to spread information about the progress of her movement and her clinics. In May 1922, Marie triumphantly produced the first edition of the magazine *Birth Control News* which she edited. W.H. Smith refused to distribute the magazine but it had private subscribers from all social classes. Movingly, one of the subscribers was a miner whose wife had died giving birth to twins.

As well as giving news from the regions the magazine covered national events. In 1930 *Birth Control News* publicised the permissive *Memorandum*

153/MCW issued by the Ministry of Health which allowed local authorities to give birth control advice when a further pregnancy would damage the health of the mother. This significant Memorandum was not circulated by the Ministry and was unknown until reprinted by Marie in *Birth Control News*. Her publication had gained a national coup and forced the Ministry to publicise its change of policy.¹⁹

Just as *Married Love* helped to open discussion of sexual relations so her birth control campaign helped to raise the acceptable profile of contraception. However, it was a struggle to change attitudes as this confidential BBC correspondence, dating from as late as 1942, demonstrates. After Marie's request for a broadcast appeal for the Constructive Birth Control Mothers' Clinics she received a reply from the BBC written on 12 September 1942 which explains that 'the subject of birth control, with which your name is naturally associated in the public mind, is one which the Corporation has long held to be unsuitable for discussion in broadcasts'.²⁰ The letter went on to give as a reason that the susceptibilities of many of the BBC's listeners were acutely involved. As will be seen in the Epilogue to this book the BBC did eventually allow Marie to be interviewed after World War II, but not specifically on this subject.

My unpublished research carried out in 1978, by interviewing women who were then in their seventies and eighties, showed a similar ambivalence to the use of birth control. A group of friends in Glossop, Derbyshire explained to me how they had their own methods of preventing pregnancy by jumping off 'slop stones' or down stairs. They said there was a man in their local pub, before World War II, who reputedly would sell male appliances. However, they were all adamant that they would not like their husbands to use such things even though they were legal and more effective. In contrast, when interviewing an elderly woman in Stockport, also in 1978, she asked her husband to fetch a box which contained a diaphragm that she had purchased in the 1930s. She told me that she never wanted to throw it away as it had given her so much pleasure.²¹

Marie's contribution to the formation of the birth control movement is now being recognised as her enduring legacy. Peter Eaton and Marilyn Warnick, in their catalogue of Marie's books and articles, rightly classify her birth control literature under the heading 'Health and Social Welfare'.²⁰ Marie continued to write on contraceptive issues until seven years before her death from cancer. However, the next chapter shows how she moved way from just writing about birth control to taking practical action in the founding of birth control clinics.

NOTES

1. Jenkins, Lyndsey, *Lady Lytton: Aristocrat. Suffragette. Martyr.* (London, 2015) p. 220.
2. Hall, Ruth, *Marie Stopes.* (London, 1976) pp. 137–154. Rose, June, *Marie Stopes.* (London, 1992) pp. 105–129.
3. Stopes-Roe, Harry, *Marie Stopes.* (London, 1974) pp. 39–40.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 41.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 45.
6. Movingly this photograph of their baby, dressed in white baby clothes, is kept in the Stopes Papers Archive. A man's arm can just be seen in this picture. British Library Stopes Papers. Add MSS 58770.
7. Hall, Ruth, *Marie Stopes.* pp. 249–250.
8. Mary Stopes Roe to Clare Debenham, November 2014.
9. Sanger, Margaret, *My Fight for Birth Control.* (London, 1932) p. 102.
10. Hall, Ruth, *Marie Stopes.* p. 117.
11. Rose, June, *Marie Stopes.* pp. 147–149.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 147.
13. Brittain, Vera, *Testament of Youth.* (London, 1933) quoted in Marie Stopes, *Eugenics and the English Birth Control Movement.* (ed. Robert Peel). John Peel, Chapter I, 'The Evolution of Marie Stopes', p. 14.
14. Jenkins, Lyndsey, *Lady Lytton.* p. 220.
15. *Ibid.*
16. British Library, Stopes Papers, Add MSS 58493.
17. *Ibid.*
18. *Ibid.*
19. Rose, June, *Marie Stopes.* p. 159.
20. BBC Caversham Park Archives. File 1 Marie Stopes, 1931–1962.
21. Eaton, Peter and Warnwick, Marilyn, *Marie Stopes. A Preliminary Check List.* (London, 1977).

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CHAPTER 6

The Growth of the Constructive Birth Control Clinics

Abstract This chapter shows Marie Stopes' empathy with working-class mothers and how she encouraged their attendance, as well as middle-class patients, to her clinics. It describes how the first birth control clinic in the country was founded by Marie in Holloway Road in a poor part of London and a detailed description of this clinic is given. The organisation of her clinics is discussed and the ways she differentiated it from a rival birth control organisation, the Society for the Provision of Birth Control Clinics. Her influence is shown in work with local enthusiasts to spread birth control clinics to other parts the country. The birth control methods which she advocated are described in her book *Contraception*.

Keywords Constructive Birth Control and Racial Progress (CBC)
• Society for the Provision of Birth Control Clinics (SPBCC) • Stopes' *Contraception*

On the opening of her first clinic, there was a gaggle of mothers waiting outside who Marie realised were too petrified to enter. Therefore, she instructed Mrs Richardson to go outside and lead each of the women by the hand into the clinic.
Deborah Cohen¹

On 17 March 1917 Marie put her ideas into action by courageously providing a venue for personal contraceptive advice for women and men

when she and her husband opened the first British birth control clinic at 61 Marlborough Road, Holloway in a converted shop. As the above quotation shows, there were important difficulties to overcome in reaching the women and men who most needed her advice. This chapter traces how the success of this London venture, in a working-class district, eventually led to other clinics being started under the aegis of her organisation, Constructive Birth Control and Racial Progress (CBC), throughout the country.



Fig. 6.1 Exterior and interior views of the country's first birth control clinic at Marlborough Road, Holloway, London (Marie Stopes International)

Marie believed birth control clinics should have four aims: to help the poor; to test out the attitude of the working-class towards birth control; to obtain first-hand data about contraception; and to collect data on the sex lives of women.² In *Married Love* she had given detailed particulars of birth control methods and provided three criteria for successful birth control: safety, entire harmlessness, and the minimum of disturbance in the sex act.

Contraception had frequently been seen as a male responsibility involving abstinence, withdrawal or the use of a condom (sheath) which many men disliked. Women had to put their trust in their husbands to limit their families. In contrast, Marie's method of the use of the cervical cap by wives gave women control over their fertility.

Marlborough Road had many of the physical features of later clinics. It was located in Holloway which was a densely populated working-class area of London. Rather than being in an area familiar to middle-class volunteers, clinics were deliberately situated in areas which were familiar to working-class mothers and in which they felt comfortable. However, these inner-city venues could seem threatening to outsiders as volunteers of the other birth control organisation, the Society for the Provision of Birth Control Clinics (SPBCC) soon discovered. Dr Olive Gimson of the Manchester and Salford SPBCC took her dogs to guard her car in what she perceived to be the crime-ridden area surrounding the clinic. Volunteer Dilys Dean paid tribute to the Manchester University wives who made the journey on their bikes to the clinic in Salford in all weathers.³

Local shops in which to situate their clinics were a popular choice for birth control activists, especially if the clinic was on the ground floor which was convenient for mothers with prams. Marie Stopes demanded that the birth control clinic entrance should be inconspicuous so the poster advertising her *Birth Control News* shown in the photograph was probably placed in the window of her Holloway clinic for the benefit of the photographer.

Previously, women had to visit doctors or hospitals for birth control advice and many women, especially those from the working class, found this medicalisation of contraception frightening and off-putting. In contrast, Marie wanted her clinics to be welcoming and non-threatening, staffed by women who empathised with their patients.

Marie advocated that the interior of her clinics should be a sanctuary to put apprehensive mothers at ease and that the women visiting the clinic should come not to discuss disease but rather for a life-affirming

experience.⁴ Marie herself selected the paint colours so the clinic was painted in relaxing blue and white colours and the nurses were dressed in colour-matching blue and white uniforms. The photographs in her book *Contraception* show the Holloway Clinic decorated to her taste with dark oak furniture, potted plants and cherubic prints of babies. These latter Marie thought to be important as they emphasised respectability. A sympathetic journalist from the *Star* newspaper describes the clinic's decoration in lyrical phrases: 'On the old Jacobean table a huge jar of pink and white roses with up-climbing branches of tender green.' Marie, forever practical, insisted on there being a waiting room with guarded fire as well as someone to mind the children while their mothers were being fitted with contraceptive devices.⁵

Marie welcomed middle-class mothers to her clinics but wanted it recognised that they were also affordable for the working class. She publicised the fact that the clinics' appliances were sold at cost or even given free so there was no need for her patients to ruin themselves by buying high-priced goods at scandalously wicked fees. Marie spread this message by publicising her clinics in the cheap paper *John Bull*. She made the point that no letters of introduction were required and, if necessary, the consultation was free. The costs were subsidised and the running costs of the Marlborough Road, Holloway clinic in the first year were £1100 which was equivalent to Marie's income earned from her books.

Marie could show empathy with working-class mothers and recognised the importance of their emotional needs. The quotation at this chapter heading contains a vivid description by Deborah Cohen of the drama of the opening of her Marlborough Road Clinic. The examination room was prepared and Mrs Richardson, the receptionist had tidied the waiting area. However, although there was queue of women who had gathered outside, none of these ventured inside. Marie realised that the women had probably been terrified by horror stories and were too frightened to enter. She therefore instructed Mrs Richardson to go outside and, to give them confidence, lead each of the women by the hand, inside the clinic.⁶

Marie believed that the women who attended her clinics should be treated sympathetically. She wished the mothers to be given time to relax before the consultation. She writes in *Contraception*, 'Medical knowledge pure and simple is for these poor women not sufficient. They need deep

personal understanding and help, not only instruction in the use of the method which will secure them freedom from conception but also in their sex lives.' This judgement was reinforced by her friend Mary Stocks at the 1929 National Council of Women's Conference: 'No one recognised how shy, ignorant and desperate the average married woman without means could be.'⁷ Marie intended to treat and educate 'the whole woman' in her clinics.

There soon came into being another national birth control organisation which Marie regarded as a rival. The first Society for the Promotion of Birth Control Clinics (SPBCC) clinic was opened on 9 November 1921 at 153a East Street, Walworth behind the Elephant and Castle public house and was also situated in a poor part of London. The SPBCC was a much more democratic organisation, less dominated by one person and involving middle-class and working-class married women as volunteers in their local clinics.⁸ Marie always believed her CBC clinics to be superior to the SPBCC as they provided a 'blueprint' for birth control work and therefore she always regarded the existence of SPBCC as superfluous and unnecessary.

There were also differences in routine procedures between the two birth control organisations. Whereas the SPBCC relied on lay workers to take case histories from mothers who were then examined by a doctor, in the CBC clinics women were routinely examined by a midwife and referred to a doctor only in the case of abnormalities. Marie felt that doctors were associated by her patients with illness so Dr Jane Lorimer Hawthorne of Harley Street, who acted as the clinic's consultant, rarely visited the premises because the central role was carried out by qualified midwives.

Marie wanted her nurses to be State Registered with the Central Midwives Board. They were all were married women with children who were specially selected to be sympathetic to the mothers attending. Nurse Hebbes, who was active in the clinic at Marlborough Road Holloway, had previously worked in the East End and was, like many of those involved in the birth control movement, an active suffragist. She took the patients' personal histories, made vaginal examinations, fitted the women with pessaries and showed them how to use them. There is a photograph of the Holloway midwives in their starched uniforms seated round Marie. Marie worked closely with the midwives and demanded detailed weekly reports from them. The midwives were able to relate to their patients and were committed to their work.⁹



Fig. 6.2 Marie, at the centre, surrounded round by her midwives, at her Constructive Birth Control Clinic in Marlborough Road, Holloway, London (Marie Stopes International)

Marie maintained absolute confidence in the competence of her midwives. Not only did they have a large amount of autonomy in the clinics but they were later entirely on their own in her mobile birth control caravans. Marie was appreciative of her midwives' work as illustrated by a letter written to Fenella Paton in Aberdeen extolling the virtues of Nurse Rae. Marie's letters show that she had known Nurse Rae for over twenty years and as late as 28 December 1956, near the end of Marie's life, Nurse Rae wrote a letter of thanks to Marie for her assistance.

My book *Birth Control and the Rights of Women* describes how many women had been forced to rely on their husbands in order to limit their families. Male methods included abstinence, withdrawal or wearing a rubber sheath (condom) which many men found unpleasant. In my 1978 interviews with women who had been sexually active in the inter-war years, many respondents paid tribute to their husbands who were good men, but not always careful.

There were female methods to limit families but these were often ineffective or dangerous. Douching after sexual intercourse was used by

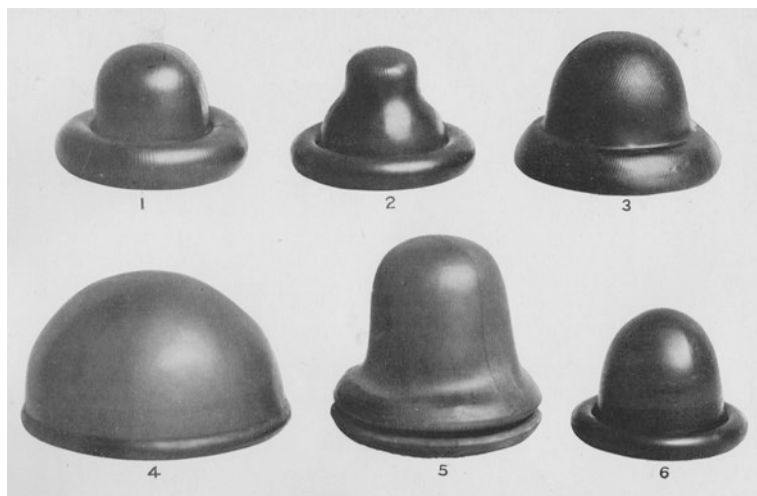


Fig. 6.3 Rubber diaphragms also known as cervical caps. Number 6 is the Pro-Race cap that Marie Stopes recommended Stopes, Marie. *Contraception* (London, 1924)

women but often did not work. As a last resort, and often in panic, women resorted to self-abortion by taking substances or inflicting physical injury on themselves. There was also a network of women who could be paid to induce an abortion.

The availability of the rubber diaphragm for women, which was both safe and affordable, can be regarded as a significant liberating achievement. Marie prescribed at her CBC clinics a small, high-domed rubber cap which she had designed herself. She called it the 'Pro-Race Cap' and it was used with oil, and made shallow enough to allow male and female secretions to mix. Also recommended was a sponge with either quinine or chinosol suppositories. Marie disliked the use of the large rubber Dutch cap with a watch-spring rim because she believed it stretched the walls of the vagina. She also believed it covered the sensitive tissue of the vagina, though she would consider the Dutch cap for women with damaged cervixes or those who were overweight. The SPBCC at their clinics favoured prescribing the larger Dutch cap and spermicidal gels.

At first Marie discouraged the use of male condoms as she felt women did not have full control over contraception and they deprived women of male seminal secretions. However, by the 1930s Marie was willing to stock good quality condoms. Her mystical view of bodily fluids was regarded as old fashioned by the other birth control organisations.¹⁰

Marie Stopes in *The First Five Thousand* and *The First Ten Thousand Cases* provides a series of brief case histories of those attending her clinic which showed that up to July 1928, 2092 women had been twice pregnant but fifteen women had been pregnant thirteen times. Some also had physical abnormalities such as slit cervixes. The following examples are taken from the 1925 Report on those attending the Constructive Birth Control Clinic at Holloway:

- B2. Husband unfaithful because wife denied union because of fear of pregnancy.
- B.8. Seventeen pregnancies, ten living. Husband and wife can neither read nor write.
- B.14. Has six criminal abortions
- G.15. Only 28 years of age and has had nine pregnancies – three living children, one dead, five miscarriages.
- H.11. Used coitus interruptus. Eight pregnancies.
- H.17. Tried douching, sheath, quinine pessaries, coitus interruptus. All failed. Six children.
- H.27. Sterile. Wanted a baby and became pregnant as a result of a visit to the clinic.¹¹

All the new birth control clinics wanted to know whether their methods had been successful and if the mothers followed the correct procedure which required commitment. However, Marie used a decidedly unscientific approach in her analysis of the Holloway Clinic's *First Five Thousand*:

Of the five thousand, seventeen returned, and were found to be definitely pregnant, fourteen others who reported in doubt were later visited and found to be pregnant, these yielding a percentage of actual failures of under one percent, which compares to quite remarkable advantage with the percentage of failure of all other methods.

Other birth control pioneers such as Lella Secor Florence in Birmingham were quick to point out that every case should have been followed up. Marie's assumptions were erroneous. She reasoned that because a woman did not return to the clinic their methods had worked for her and she was not pregnant.¹² Marie chose to ignore her scientific statistical training in this instance.

Marie considered it her duty to spread birth control knowledge beyond her own clinics and was particularly keen to instruct doctors in her

methods. *The Lancet* in the 1930s carried notices of such instructional sessions and gave notice of a demonstration by Mrs (note the prefix) Stopes and Dr Evelyn Fisher at their clinic in Whitfield Street, London. The paper stated that those attending would be able to practise the application of various contraceptive devices.

The numbers of mothers attending the Marie Stopes' clinics were remarkably large and soon caused the clinics to expand. The Holloway Clinic moved to more spacious premises five years later, but still operated in a working-class area of London. Although patients had been originally suspicious of the clinic during its first year, by 1929 some 10,000 had received advice there.

Marie recognised that many women would have difficulty reaching clinics, so copying the use of caravans by the suffragettes, she had the imaginative idea of equipping two mobile caravans, staffed by midwives, which travelled to rural areas and small towns in the North of England.¹³ However, these were cramped and uncomfortable for the nurses. As described in the chapter on Marie's battles, the caravans were also easy targets for protesters and suffered arson attacks. Marie kept in close contact with the nurses by letter and she had confidence in their ability to treat even the most difficult cases.

Marie Stopes was truly a birth control evangelist. Although she opposed the SPBCC for their different methods, on a personal level Marie was always ready to help others start clinics in their own areas. In 1925 she spoke to medical students at the University of Liverpool and as a result a SPBCC clinic was started in that city where the volunteers gave out cups of tea to relax the apprehensive mothers.¹⁴

Networking was important and Marie was also helpful to SPBCC birth controllers in Manchester and Salford. Charis Frankenburg recounts in her autobiography¹⁵:

Having read the books by Dr Marie Stopes. D.Sc. (Palaeontology), and profited by her expertise – we had four children spaced exactly as intended – I wrote in the autumn of 1925 to ask her to tell me of someone near Manchester who might be interested in setting up a Birth Control Clinic. She suggested Mrs John Stocks. I recognised her as Mary Brinton who I had known at St Paul's and immediately wrote asking if she would help. She agreed enthusiastically.

The two women, of different political persuasions, were co-founders with other enthusiasts, of the Manchester and Salford Mothers' clinic

which opened in 1926. Charis Frankenburg, through her local contacts enlisted the help of Mrs Eccleshall in Salford and they had the use of the upstairs floor in her pie shop, which was convenient and provided ideal cover for the mothers.

Charis Frankenburg and Mary Stocks had visited the Stopes' clinic but preferred the SPBCC model where the volunteers had a wider role. Although all patients were seen by the doctor on their first visit they interacted with the volunteers. Charis, like Marie, recognised that 'Our mothers feel they have been talked to by somebody who understands their problems. We do not hurry them.'¹⁶ In one significant example Mary Williams praises Charis as 'an exceptionally good woman'. This is remarkably generous of her as some years before Charis' husband had sacked Mary Williams from his factory in Salford.¹⁷

Marie was also supportive of Fenella Paton's independent clinic in Aberdeen, founded in 1926, and Fenella's son remembers Marie coming to stay with them.¹⁸ Fenella had links with leading Liberal politicians and came from a wealthy background. She had become aware of the birth control movement while working with disadvantaged women in the East End of London. On moving back to Aberdeen, after three years of marriage, with the help of family and friends, she financed a birth control clinic there. Over the ensuing years Fenella carried out a long correspondence with Marie who came to speak in Aberdeen in September 1934. Marie predictably urged Fenella to join her birth control organisation but Fenella repeatedly refused, believing it important for the clinic to retain its Scottish identity. However, eventually Fenella could not continue financially to support the clinic and so allowed Marie to take it over, which meant that Marie could then have a base in Scotland.

Not all Marie's efforts to found clinics proved to be successful. Miners' leader, David Daggar, having read about Marie Stopes' achievements, was anxious to establish a birth control clinic for mothers in his local hospital in Wales at Abertillery. Marie's husband, Humphrey, corresponded with David and Marie was present at interviews for the clinic nurse and supervised the training of Nurse Naomi Jones. In spite of Naomi's efforts the clinic quickly failed because of local opposition particularly from local chapels. Marie wrote in the *Western Mail* in 1937 that 'The Abertillery Clinic was killed by gossip.' The women were afraid to attend the Abertillery clinic and the publicity of Marie's involvement might not have helped its cause.¹⁹

During the 1930s Marie founded regional clinics: Leeds in 1934, Belfast in 1936, Cardiff in 1937 and Swansea in 1943.²⁰ She could therefore claim that her organisation was nationwide. Dr Greta Jones provides a perceptive analysis of Marie's struggle to establish the clinic in Belfast and the reasons for its demise shortly after World War II, due primarily to a lack of a viable support network. This is discussed in more detail in the next chapter.

Marie regarded her mission as being world-wide. In 1934 she wrote a CBC pamphlet on contraception for Indian women in which she outlined her ideas for a cheap, reliable contraceptive measure.²¹ She attacked the 'safe period' and instead recommended a contraceptive method of a sponge, cotton waste and oil. Marie continued to promote this in the 1950s but did not provide any scientific evaluation of her recommendations. She did appeal for more Indian midwives who could instruct mothers in the use of the cervical cap.

The establishment of Marie's clinics showed that women of all classes appreciated the value of birth control and were committed to carrying out its time-consuming procedures. This was both modern and liberating for women. Her work demonstrated a need by women which was eventually met by the State.

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CHAPTER 7

Marie and Her Correspondents

Abstract Marie invited readers of her books to correspond with her and both men and women took advantage of her offer. Although Marie employed secretaries, research in the archives shows that she left handwritten postscripts to individual correspondents. These unpublished letters reveal a much more compassionate side to her nature than is usually shown. Marie published a selection of these letters in her *Mother England* to prove the necessity for birth control advice.

Keywords *Mother England* • Impotence • Contraception • Abortion • Marriage relationship difficulties

Your letter is not at all long. People do not hesitate to write ten or twelve pages of purely selfish detail, so I am very glad to get a note from someone who gives information which is useful as well. British Library, Stopes Collection C. Requests for Advice.¹

We cannot know what detailed personal advice was given by Marie Stopes or the nurses in the CBC clinics, but Marie Stopes' letters to correspondents conveys detailed information about her approach. Marie's copious correspondence is archived in the British Library and the Wellcome Library, London and Senior Archivist Lesley Hall has made an insightful study of this correspondence. Unusually, Lesley Hall made a study of male

correspondents to Marie in *Hidden Anxieties* as well as examining letters, from often desperate women. A selection of Marie's letters were also collected by Ruth Hall in 1978 and published in *Dear Dr Stopes*. Marie Stopes herself published significant letters in her book *Mother England*, in order, she claimed, to give a sense of history. Her letters did not just come from correspondents in Britain, as the Archives show she received them from all over the English-speaking world including the United States, Canada, Australia and South Africa.

At the end of her highly popular *Married Love* there is a brief 'Note' which contains the following invitation by Marie: 'I invite letters from those who can confirm, qualify, or correct my views from their own experience. To obtain scientific knowledge the largest possible number of individual cases must be studied. All communication will be treated in strictest confidence.'² Well before the era of text-messaging numerous readers took advantage of this invitation to contact her through her publisher A. Fifield, 13 Clifford's Inn, London EC4. This correspondent writing on 5 July 1918 is typical of those reacting to her book: 'This evening I have read your book *Married Love* and I cannot go to bed without writing to thank you for the immense help for the future of my married life which it has given me.'³

Marie began by offering selected correspondents personal advice at two guineas a consultation but soon admitted she had been overwhelmed by the demand. There are volumes of Marie Stopes correspondence in the British Library which have been released after fifty years with the proviso that privacy must be respected.⁴ This is a logical precaution as the letters contained remarkably intimate sexual information about topics such as frigidity, masturbation and premature ejaculation. The reader wonders at Marie's patience with writers who dwelt on these themes which were obviously personal to them but fairly mundane. A typical letter was dated October 1918 and to which she replied, 'I am very glad to hear from you and your own experience.'⁵

Marie's replies showed a sympathetic side of her character and the quotation at the heading of this chapter, which Marie wrote in April 1921, is typical of her encouraging response to her correspondents. She went out of her way to reassure writers who submitted long letters, often over ten pages long, that they were not being presumptuous⁶ and a recent exhibition indicated a range of her letters. Marie describes the letter writers:

One correspondent rambled on for twenty-four pages, whereas many others hesitantly scribbled a few lines. Others scrawl a few lines. There is poetry,

personal history and a grey exercise book that records the sender's sexual urges in minute detail. Pleading letters, insulting letters, lunatic letters, explicit letters, letters that deal with every aspect of sex, pregnancy and birth control.⁷

Marie eventually employed four secretaries to cope with the ever-increasing flow of letters. The secretaries had obviously been provided with stock replies to the most common problems and the replies had been typed ready for Marie's signature. However, it can be seen that a high proportion of replies contain Marie's handwritten comments as an addendum. Marie could not just let the standard replies be sent and her comments come over as concerned and caring. Lesley Hall has rightly referred to the flexibility and compassion shown in Marie's private correspondence.⁸

Whereas it was predominantly women who visited her clinics, a high proportion of her correspondents were men. Their personal problems, often arising from World War I, figured in their letters and to these she gave advice outside her birth control remit. Her correspondence vividly illustrates the pressure of war on men serving in the armed forces. She advised one serving officer who wrote to her on 4 December 1918 about whether they should delay starting a family until he was discharged from the Army to 'have your baby before going to the Front'.⁹ In other replies she gave advice to men on masturbation and sexual pleasure but warned, 'You must know that it takes time, if not years to adjust.' Many of her male correspondents said they were making a present of *Married Love* to their wives.

Working-class women wrote to Marie about the practical concerns of birth control rather than sexual pleasure. They were careful to justify their actions as did this correspondent writing to her in 1919:

I am a married woman with one child of fifteen months and expecting another. I live in the most appalling dread of having a large family as I far from strong. I have no mother living and I am ignorant of birth control. It is not that I am cowardly of childbirth but I wish my children a good education and a good start in life...I would not mind three or four children, with reasonable intervals between them.¹⁰

Marie was careful to address these practical concerns.

Marie soon recognised the importance of sharing this correspondence. *Mother England* is a representative collection of selected letters sent to her which Marie published in 1929 and which illustrate the main themes in

her correspondence. She selected letters from writers whose surnames began A-H and their home towns as well as names were deleted so their letters are completely anonymous. The moving sub-title is an illustration of the purpose of the book, 'Self-written by those who have no historian'. Marie was clear about the purpose of publishing this correspondence in which she hoped to shed light upon what she termed 'submerged lives'. She wanted 'to grip the imagination and wring the hearts of those who read them and to force the community to face these awful facts'.¹¹

The timing of the publication of her book, as well as influencing the opinions of the general public, was intended to influence members of the Commission set up by the Ministry of Health to examine the issue of Maternal Mortality. Marie criticised the Ministry for refusing to co-opt a member of her organisation on to the Committee so this book was one way of appealing to the Commission's members. She distributed her book widely. The Duke of York accepted his copy of *Mother England* although the other members of the royal family predictably declined their copies.

Marie's *Mother England* includes letters from desperate women seeking help:

Dear Dr Stopes. I am writing to know if you would give me some advice as I am only twenty-seven and have five children the oldest nine years and the youngest eighteen months and my husband is always out of work and it is a continual worry to me from one months end to the other as don't want any more children. hoping to have an early reply I remain, Yours Faithfully (Mrs) W.B.

Dear Dr Stopes I am a young mother of two beautiful children. I had a terrible time for both, having to have instruments. The Dr told me I wasn't to have any more. Could you please give me some advice how to prevent any more coming. I am your truly W.J.B

Dear Dr Stopes. Will you be kind enough to tell me where I can obtain the appliances mentioned in your book on Birth Control. I haven't the courage to go into a shop. I may say the matron told me to go to the Women's Hospital but as she did not tell me what for I did not go. Yours faithfully, M.B.

The letters, contained in pages 1–178 of her book, show a mixture of ignorance and desperation from women who had tried to terminate a pregnancy with remedies ranging from Widow Welch's pills, to hot gin, pennyroyal or quinine. The correspondents in these dire situations appealed to Marie: 'Can you send me a prescription which would help to

put me right again. No one knows I am writing to you, except my husband and he has not read this letter.'

Marie's replies are not always known but it can be assumed, because of legal constraints, they had to be negative as regards terminating a pregnancy.¹² Publicly Marie condemned abortion as any hint of illegality or scandal could have resulted in the closure of her clinics. However, in this one case Marie made an addendum to the typed letter and in her own handwriting recommended that she contact a doctor in Harley Street and advises this woman to mention Dr Stopes' name. The doctor concerned was not Dr Jane Hawthorne, the clinic doctor, but a male doctor. No doubt Marie did not wish the contact to jeopardise the reputation of her clinic and give material to her adversaries.¹³

Marie not only replied to letters from ordinary men and women enquirers, but Ruth Hall's collection of letters showed that she also entered into correspondence with members of the medical profession and the clergy. With these men, and their wives, she had to allay their professional scruples.¹⁴

It was obvious from her replies that Marie gave careful thought to her answers whether it be in replying to titled men or to working-class mothers. Indeed, she appeared to be more sympathetic to those who consulted her at a distance than to her immediate family. These selected letters in 1929 illustrate the importance to her of the birth control campaign.

In the conclusion of *Mother England*, Marie dramatically challenges her readers on the subject of maternal mortality by stating: 'Murder will out! Now that this fragment of contemporary history is made public it must be perceived that maternal mortality and the absence of instruction in birth control are not unrelated.'¹⁵ Marie had already alerted the public with the statistic that approximately 3000 mothers a year died in childbirth or related illnesses and writes that letter after letter states the correspondent's doctor had advised against bearing more children as her life would be endangered. The mother therefore has the dilemma of having unwanted children or refusing her husband's sexual wishes and so damaging their relationship. Sexual relations were therefore maintained, often resulting in a pregnancy, which the mother dangerously sought to terminate. The dangers of abortion were highlighted by the fact that the nurse in one of Marie's travelling clinics received only thirteen requests for birth control but eighty demands for criminal abortion.¹⁶

Marie acted in the role of what is now termed 'agony aunt' and these columns are now essential columns in popular newspapers and magazines.

Her detailed replies to the letters she received demonstrate that Marie gave much thought to her answers which were both practical and constructive. Her responses show empathy and understanding. This is ironic considering that she did not show the same qualities in her relationships with either her first or second husbands. Marie was also unusual in seeing the political potential of these letters and selecting some of the correspondence to publicly further her crusade for birth control advice.

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CHAPTER 8

Battles with Doctors, Clergy and Politicians

Abstract This chapter discusses why, after her successful victory in court over the annulment of her first marriage, Marie challenged Roman Catholic medical doctor, Dr Halliday Sutherland, in a succession of court cases. She continued her principled disagreements with the Roman Catholic Church, criticising it in her book, *Roman Catholic Methods of Birth Control* and her pamphlets. Marie also angered Anglican bishops, discussing birth control in their Lambeth Conferences, by claiming Divine inspiration. The conciliatory Dr Helena Wright later persuaded the bishops to change their policy, which placed the Mothers' Union in a quandary. Marie's combative attitude irritated members of the medical establishment and she even alienated fellow birth controllers in their newly founded collaborative organisation, the National Birth Control Council.

Keywords Dr Halliday Sutherland • Pope Pius XI • Archbishop Temple • Mothers' Union • Dr Helena Wright • National Birth Control Council (later National Birth Control Association)

A woman who is a Doctor of German Philosophy (Munich) has opened a birth control clinic where working-class women are instructed. Halliday Sutherland, Birth Control, 1922¹

Marie Stopes provoked opposition even amongst those who broadly shared her views. This chapter describes her battles with the medical establishment, the Roman Catholic Church, the Anglican Church, the Free Churches, and local and national politicians. Often these opposition categories would overlap as in the case of Roman Catholics/medical profession as Catholic doctrine emphasised that sexual relations within marriage should be for the prime purpose of procreation. In addition, Marie even managed to alienate many of her fellow birth control pioneers from the other birth control organisations. Her opponents tried to belittle Marie both as a woman and as an academic.

Her battle with Dr Halliday Sutherland, medical doctor and a Roman Catholic, was to have long-term repercussions. Marie brought her high-profile libel case on 21 February 1923 when she sued Dr Halliday Sutherland for defamation of character. After a career abroad Dr Sutherland became Deputy Commissioner for TB Medical Service in England and Wales. The doctor was brought up in the Church of Scotland but he converted to Catholicism in 1919. Indeed Chapter Eighteen of his autobiography was entitled 'My Path to Rome'.² His opposition to Marie was informed by a lecture he attended on 7 July 1921 given by Professor Anne Louise McIlroy, Professor of Obstetrics and Gynaecology at the Royal Free Hospital, when she criticised the use of the rubber check diaphragm as a harmful method of birth control.

Sutherland's own book on birth control contains the following attack on Marie and this extended quotation gives a flavour of his vitriol to which she understandably objected:

In the midst of a London slum, a woman who is a Doctor of *German Philosophy* (Munich) has opened a birth control clinic, where working class women are instructed in a method as 'the most harmful method of which I have had experience'.

It is truly amazing that this monstrous campaign of birth control should be tolerated by the Home Secretary.³

Marie's own lawyers tried to prevent her taking an action for libel by saying that very few people would have read the offending article and the legal action would be expensive. Certainly Dr Halliday Sutherland's book had only sold eight hundred copies and not been widely read. However, for Marie the legal action became a matter of principle as she rightly felt her scientific credentials were being belittled. Possibly Marie took this course

of action because she wanted the publicity, but although the case made the national press, this seems an unlikely main motive as there were less costly battles she could have fought. Dr. Lesley Hall interestingly argues that Marie's successful experience of the Divorce Courts where she won a decree of nullity from her husband Ruggles Gates may have given Marie a rather optimistic view of her ability to manipulate the legal system.⁴

Marie with outstanding qualifications in science, and who having lectured medical students at the University of Manchester, naturally found Sutherland's remarks about her academic qualifications gratuitously offensive. Marie possessed doctorates, not just from Munich but University College London, but Sutherland chose to omit these qualifications and insultingly stressed the fact that she was a woman.

Marie's barrister was the high-profile Patrick Hastings who then was at the peak of his legal powers. Hastings argued that Marie's German qualifications were denigrated because of the anti-German sentiment left over from World War I and he demonstrated that Marie had a brilliant scientific record. Throughout the trial Sutherland's defence sought to belittle Marie's professional qualifications by referring to her pointedly as Mrs Stopes rather than Dr Stopes.

Marie had annoyed the medical establishment and the trial gave an opportunity for many of them, such as Australian doctor Norman Haire, to settle old scores. Marie had once been friendly with Haire, but later he upset her by separately running a birth control clinic in Walworth. Marie had asked him to investigate the 'gold-pin' which was growing in popularity in America. Haire investigated the device and found it dangerous as it could contribute to abortions. This episode was raised at the Sutherland trial, even though Marie was extremely conservative in her methods and had never used this method in her clinics.

In the trial Marie stressed that birth control was not illegal and that she had never experimented on poor women. Amongst those called to give evidence against her was Professor McIlroy whose remarks had sparked off the action. Under cross-examination by Patrick Hastings the Professor admitted that she had never witnessed any woman using a rubber check diaphragm. After the end of the trial Marie took her revenge on Professor McIlroy who she had heard was fitting this contraceptive device at the Royal Free Hospital. In her book *Ten Thousand Patients* Marie describes how theatrically she disguised herself as a work-grimed charwoman and after a wait of three hours was conveniently fitted with the rubber check pessary by the same Professor McIlroy.⁵

Dr Halliday Sutherland, in his autobiography *A Time to Keep*, describes the long wait for the verdict which was delivered at five past eight in the evening. It was a contradictory verdict:

'Are the words defamatory?' 'Yes.'
 'Are they true in substance and in fact?' 'Yes.'
 'Are they fair comment?' 'No.'
 'Damages, if any?' '£100.'⁶

These four verdicts were less than a straightforward judgment. Marie appealed the verdict and Lord Justices Banks and Scrutton awarded her an increased amount of £100 damages plus half the costs of the action and the costs of the appeal. However, the case was eventually referred to the House of Lords by Dr Sutherland and finally he won. Dr Sutherland's expenses for the trial were £10,000, paid for by a Catholic fund. The legal expenses cost Marie and Humphrey over £12,000 with a donation of £1000 from Putnams, her publishers. In a further development later in 1929, Dr Halliday Sutherland sued Marie for libel, but this time he lost the case.⁷

The court case, though costly, achieved what Marie might have wanted. She painted herself as the unjustly victimised heroine fighting for the good of others. The archive at the British Library shows that Marie gained publicity in the national and local press. Many of her correspondents came to her as a result of reading *Married Love* or accounts of the court case.

Marie continued her campaign against the Roman Catholic Church when in 1930 Pope Pius XI issued an encyclical on Christian marriage (*Casti Conubii*) which condemned birth control as a mortal sin. In her *Birth Control News* Marie consistently attacked the Roman Catholic position and wrote *Contraception* stating her own methods of birth control.⁸ In 1933 Marie responded to the encyclical by writing *Roman Catholic Methods of Birth Control* which enabled her to attack both the Papal Encyclical and the Roman Catholic permitted birth control methods. Marie scientifically defines birth control as 'the use by either sex of any means whatsoever whereby coitus (the act of union between man and woman) may be experienced, while at the same time the fusion of the ovum with the spermatozoon may be averted so that conception does not take place'.⁹ Marie lists the methods that the Roman Catholic Church permitted and which she feels were hypocritical. These Roman Catholic approved methods included choosing from the calendar the days for sexual

intercourse when the woman was thought to be infertile, after coitus the woman carrying out actions such as sitting up or coughing, or coitus reservatus where ejaculation was postponed. However, coitus interruptus, where the penis is withdrawn before ejaculation, was considered a sin.¹⁰ Marie makes the point that none of these recommended methods were particularly effective and many relied on the skill of the man rather than the self-determination of the woman.

Marie always opposed the Roman Catholic belief that the main function of sexual intercourse was procreation. However, her book *Catholic Methods of Birth Control* attracted much less press attention than Marie had anticipated. Therefore she requested assistance in publicising the book from Keith Briant, her close friend and biographer, and so he became a reluctant ally. Marie chained her authored book to the foot of the font in the Roman Catholic Cathedral and Keith had to alert the Press Association to obtain maximum publicity.¹¹

Marie, not without reason, was afraid of violence from Roman Catholic members. In Salford, my earlier research describes how the Society for the Provision of Birth Control Clinics (SPBCC) clinic, started by Mary Stocks and Charis Frankenburg, came to be unfortunately situated directly opposite the Roman Catholic Cathedral. This provoked crowds of angry protesters, some throwing bricks.¹² Marie's premises faced similar anger and in November 1928 a Roman Catholic spinster, Elizabeth Ellis, was convicted of arson. She had tried to set fire to one of Marie's birth control caravans in Bradford. Elizabeth refused to be bound over for the peace and one week later she set fire to the caravan again and this time she gutted it completely.¹³

Throughout her career in birth control she remained suspicious of Roman Catholics. When she went to Aberdeen to visit the birth control clinic there, Fenella Paton's son remembered her asking whether their housekeeper was a Roman Catholic.¹⁴ Yet Marie was not always consistent, as she admired Lord Alfred Douglas, a friend of Oscar Wilde, and although he was a Roman Catholic she wanted his friendship and his approval for her writings.

However, individual Roman Catholics did express sympathy for Marie's work on improving marital relations. The Jesuit priest Father Stanilaus St John, whilst taking issue with Marie's stance on birth control, initially praised *Married Love's* message. This endorsement was initially published by Marie in the work's Preface for which she was grateful. Stanilaus praised her by writing, 'As a piece of thoughtful, scientific writing and I find it

admirable throughout, and it seems to me your theme could not have been treated in more beautiful or more delicate language.’¹⁵ However, the priest was pressurised by his authorities to withdraw his endorsement, and it was subsequently deleted from the Preface in the seventh edition of *Married Love* in 1919 and from later reprints.

There is no doubt that one of Marie’s reasons for founding her clinic in Belfast, Northern Ireland was to challenge the Roman Catholic Church. After the 1922 partition there was a condemnation of birth control by the Irish Free State. In 1929 the advertisement of birth control products was made illegal there and in 1935 the Criminal Law Amendment Act banned the import of contraceptives. Many women in Ireland, to limit their families, relied on later marriage and used home-made contraceptives, with abortion being used as a last resort. There were individual advocates of birth control in Ireland before Marie but it was not considered respectable and the methods were not widely known.

Not only did Marie’s clinic serve the women of Belfast but, in spite of the expense, a number of women from the Irish Free State travelled to her clinic. However, this clinic had a troubled history and Dr Greta Jones has shown how it was beset by both internal and external difficulties.¹⁶ Marie had difficulty recruiting well-qualified women doctors for her clinic, although there were enthusiastic and loyal nurses. The clinic lacked the extensive supporting network of her London clinic and so was relatively isolated. It survived until just after World War II but closed in 1947 when Marie felt she could not continue to financially support it. Marie did not consider the clinic a success but arguably one of its achievements was to influence the local Belfast hospital to provide birth control information to mothers.

The Anglican Bishops, like the Roman Catholic Church, were suspicious of Marie who claimed to be a Prophet with direct authority from God. In the Halliday Sutherland libel trial she was asked by the opposing barrister about the basis for her views contained in her book *New Gospel*.

- Q. Do you say it is the transmission of a message saying direct from Almighty God through you?
- A. I say that.
- Q. Now I want to call to your attention to some things that the Almighty has said, to begin with, in my book, *A New Gospel for All Peoples*: ‘My Lords I speak to you in the name of God. You are his priests, I am his Prophet.’¹⁷

Marie had circulated her latest book *New Gospel* to bishops attending the Lambeth Conference in July 1920 and spoke of her divine guidance. Her book contains the following passage:

That week it chanced that I spent an afternoon alone in the cool shades of the old yew woods on the hills behind my home: While penetrated by that calm beauty there came suddenly and quite explicitly, exact instructions in the words which follows. I was told: 'Say to my Bishops'— what is found in these pages. At the conclusion of the message I went home instantly; sent for my secretary; and there and then re-dictated what had been dictated to me.¹⁸

This statement of her unique access to divine authority understandably annoyed the Anglican bishops and her birth control advice was rejected by their organisation.¹⁹

A decade later there was to be a change of Anglican Church policy on birth control which was probably linked to the approach of a less-confrontational woman. At the 1930 Lambeth Conference Dr Helena Wright of the SPBCC addressed the bishops and, in contrast to Marie, spoke moderately and unemotionally. She focused on informing them of her own patients who had more children than they could afford.

I had no idea if the bishops would listen, but as I described the changes I had seen in these women, and as the pictures unfolded I saw their expressions getting more and more human, and the transformation of corporate feeling. One or two would look up, and I realised, 'Yes, he's taken it in. He sees something new.'²⁰

Subsequently the 1930 Lambeth Conference accepted her arguments and made a significant change in Anglican policy to allow birth control in marriage.

The Church of England's organisation for women, the Mothers' Union, was initially hostile to the birth control campaign and so opposed Marie's position. In 1919 their Central Council passed a resolution opposing the selfish limitation of the family. They later communicated with Marie on 20 June 1921, asserting that 'birth control would lower the moral tone of the country'. The Mothers' Union continued to hold this position even after the Lambeth Conference of 1930. However, this meant the Mothers' Union was now out of step with the leadership of the Church of England. Archbishop William Temple wrote to Mrs Boustead,

President of the Mothers' Union, giving it the option of continuing its policy but forcefully putting the case for a practical recognition of the birth control arguments. The Mothers' Union was therefore pressurised to reverse its policy by the Church of England hierarchy, but did so only reluctantly.²¹ It is interesting that, in this instance, the leadership of the Church of England was more radical in its attitude to birth control than the grass-roots members.

There was also religious opposition to birth control from the Free Churches. In the mining community of Abertillery, described in Chap. 6, the local birth control clinic closed because of local objections from the Free Churches.²² This hostility from the Free Churches, who regarded birth control as immoral, was widespread

Marie, though she courted leading Cabinet members and Members of Parliament, did not get involved in detailed party politics. The party most sympathetic to the birth control issue was the Labour Party and a number of Marie's friends, such as Mary Stocks, were Labour Party members. Although individual members of parliament were sympathetic to the birth control issue, the national Labour Party did not wish it to become a leading issue which they reasoned could lose the votes of their Roman Catholic supporters. The hard-won debate on birth control was terminated by the Labour Party hierarchy at the 1928 Labour Party Women's Conference and it was not allowed to be returned to the agenda at later conferences.²³

There was local as well as national opposition to Marie's work from the Labour Party. Marie's well-publicised talk at Stockport in 1923, described in Chap. 1, created controversy, particularly amongst local Labour Party leaders who were afraid of losing vital votes from Roman Catholic electors. Mrs Elsie Plant, the joint organiser of Marie's talk, described to me how the Chair of the local Labour Party claimed that the birth controllers had lost them votes and that 'we had a black mark against us'.²⁴

Marie did not work well with other birth control campaigners. Nurse Daniels, a health visitor, was regarded as a martyr for the birth control cause when she was dismissed by Edmonton Council in December 1922. Her supposed offence was giving patients directions to the nearby Stopes' birth control clinic. There were 500 names on a petition for Nurse Daniels' reinstatement, a packed protest meeting, marches in her support by local mothers and questions in the House of Commons by her local member of parliament, Labour Party member F.A. Broad. However, whereas the SPBCC supported Nurse Daniels, Marie criticised her for insubordination

to a doctor, as she had previously been warned about her conduct. Marie's correspondence showed that on 1 January 1923 she wrote directly to Nurse Daniels demanding to know, 'Did you or did you not disobey definitely given instructions from a doctor?'²⁵ This letter was retained by Marie who did not offer any support to Nurse Daniels. Nurse Daniels later travelled to Holland to obtain further training in contraceptive techniques. Given Marie's record of rebellion against medical doctors, the position she adopted over Nurse Daniels was hypocritical.

Marie was also deeply hostile to the SPBCC which, although they shared the same broad aims, she regarded as a rival organisation. As early as 8 May 1923 SPBCC Executive Committee member Eva Hubback wrote to Marie trying to be conciliatory, 'I hope very much that our temporary phase of hostility is past and our societies may work in common. I remember you well from when you were a lecturer at Manchester University.'²⁶ Eva Hubback had been Parliamentary Secretary to the National Union of Suffrage Societies and was to serve on the Executive Committee the National Birth Control Council. However, this strategy was not effective with Marie because she always regarded the SPBCC as being unnecessary and superfluous to her own organisation.

At a national level, in July 1930 the National Birth Control Council (later the National Birth Control Association (NBCA)) was formed to co-ordinate the five existing birth control societies. The birth controllers wished to present a united front to the Government. Their main aim was to promote the provision of facilities for scientific contraception so that married people could space or limit their families and thus avoid the evils of ill-health and poverty. The Chairman was Lady Denman and included in the NBCA aims was further research and the need to promote legislation and social reform. Marie always mistrusted Lady Denman for her lack of practical experience in birth control clinics.

Many of those concerned with the NBCA were against the inclusion of Marie because she was known to be a difficult personality. The founding members of the NBCA decided to exclude her even though she had been one of the pioneers of birth control. However, Dr Helena Wright spoke out for the inclusion of Marie in the NBCA as Marie had pioneered birth control. It was agreed to include Marie if Helena could be responsible for 'managing her'.²⁷

This proved to be impossible and Helena Wright, who drove Marie home after an NBCA meeting, records that Marie was then in a furious temper saying Helena was the only member in which she had any

confidence. Marie criticised the NBCA saying ‘there seems to have been no advance in improvement in technique’ and suddenly, though not unexpectedly, resigned from the NBCA after only three years of membership.²⁸

Marie’s inability to work with religious or political organisations, or even other birth controllers, undoubtedly weakened her own campaign. Later chapters show she even had disputes with her own family.

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CHAPTER 9

Marie Stopes as a Maverick Eugeneticist

Abstract The twenty-first century debates about Eugenics have often influenced the interpretation of Marie's achievements both in scholarly and popular work. This chapter argues the case for a reassessment of Marie's relationship with Eugenics. Three fundamental questions are addressed: What did Eugenics mean to intellectuals in inter-war Britain? What were Marie's public pronouncements on Eugenics? How far were her public statements in accord with her private actions? The answers to these questions shed a new light on Marie's achievements as sexual revolutionary and birth control pioneer.

Keywords Theory versus practice of Eugenics • Thomas Malthus • Francis Galton • Eugenics Society • Adolf Hitler • Constructive Birth Control clinic, Holloway Road, London

I am a Life Fellow and would have much more interest in the Eugenics Society had I not been cold shouldered. Marie Stopes to Cora Hudson, Eugenics Society, 24 March 1934¹

The aspect of Marie Stopes' work that currently attracts notoriety is not her views on sexual relations, which attracted negative publicity in the 1920s, but rather her links with Eugenics. One such condemnatory

example is Jenni Murray, the popular presenter of BBC *Woman's Hour*, who in her recent collection of remarkable women, *A History of Britain in 21 Women*, explains her omission of Marie by writing in her introduction:

Why, for instance, I was asked, had I left out Marie Stopes, whose book *Married Love* was the first volume of advice on sex and contraception? I'm afraid that despite all the good work she did, I've never been able to excuse her interest in eugenics.²

Similarly historian Lyndsey Jenkins when discussing the suffragette Constance Lytton's relationship with Marie, makes the passing remark: 'There is no suggestion that Constance shared Marie's more dubious concerns about eugenics and racial purity.'³ Professor Maria Bucur, Indiana University Bloomington, United States in her recent book, explaining the attraction of Eugenics to Modernism, goes even further than those previous two authors in explaining the Marie's attitude:

Her support of eugenics also extended to advocating for sterilization of the weak and feeble-minded, which betrayed both racism and elitism in relation to working-class women.⁴

This book strongly argues that Marie was not a conventional Eugenicist and certainly does not deserve this vilification. As the chapter heading shows, she was not accepted by the Eugenics Society because of her unconventional views, which in any case changed over time.

In order to obtain a more balanced view of Marie's philosophy it necessary to address three fundamental questions: firstly, what did Eugenics mean to intellectuals in inter-war Britain; secondly, what Marie's public pronouncements were concerning Eugenics; and thirdly, how far her public pronouncements were in accord with her private actions. It is interesting to note that Marie, the scientist, became aware of the emotion generated by Eugenics and as early as 1933 wrote to a friend, 'I do not think I want to write a book on Eugenics. The word has been so tarnished by some people that they are not going to get my name tacked onto it.'

By the start of the twentieth century, the popularity of Eugenics had overtaken Malthusianism which dated from the end of the eighteenth century. In 1798 the Rev Thomas Malthus published *Principle of Population*. Malthus' mathematical theory was later regarded as pessimistic as he argued that unchecked population growth was exponential whilst the food

supply growth was arithmetic and so always lagged behind need. Richard Overbury in his history of Britain between the wars, *The Morbid Age*, points to the scientific optimism provided by the new science of Eugenics which was enthusiastically embraced for its positive arguments.⁵ Both Marie's first and second husbands had been influential members of the Malthusian League but later joined the Eugenics Society. Marie had also moved her membership from the Malthusian League to the Eugenics Society.

It is important not to view Eugenics through the lens of the later atrocities of National Socialism but to recognise that many proponents in the 1920s were excited by what they regarded as a radical new science for the good of humanity. Professor William Garret rightly argues in his book that Marie was a complex figure and her beliefs must be set in the context of their time. In the early twentieth century Eugenists were then proud of what they regarded as their modern scientific methods and ability to use statistics and experiments.⁶

Eugenicist Francis Galton, who Marie met as a child, drew on the evolutionary theories of natural selection advanced by his half-cousin, Charles Darwin, in *The Origin of the Species*. In his 1907 book, *Inquiries into Human Faculty and Development* Galton showed how Eugenic theory was influenced by stock-breeding practices. He believed that Eugenics were 'influences which give the more suitable races or strains of blood a better chance of prevailing over the less suitable'. Galton's work stressed the inequality of human beings which he explained by hereditary. This argument was accepted by amongst others, Professor Carr-Saunders who believed that the role of agencies of social control might improve the racial qualities of future generations either physically or mentally, and he also emphasised the importance of selective breeding.

Francis Galton's *Inquiries* provided an impetus for the formation of the Eugenics Education Society which was formed on 15 November 1907 in Caxton Hall, Westminster, although Galton did not play a direct part in this. Four years later Leonard Darwin agreed to become President in the Society's gesture to his illustrious ancestor Charles Darwin. The organisation was originally named the Eugenics Education Society to highlight its propagandist ambitions but in 1926 it felt confident enough to drop 'Education' from its title. Eugenics became a social movement when it connected with public opinion and by the 1930s the Society had 800 members drawn from the scientific, cultural and political elite, and it had a wide influence. It was understandable that Marie Stopes should be drawn

to the Eugenics Society where she could also meet other elite scientists. In my book *Birth Control and the Rights of Women* I discuss the complex relations between the other leading birth controllers and the Eugenacists.⁷

The Eugenics Society was extremely influential and contained a number of high-profile women. Marie became a member in 1912 and later became a Fellow. However, as Dr Lesley Hall of the Wellcome Library rightly points out, Marie was neither a typical birth control activist nor a typical Eugenacist.⁸ Ironically, in the light of some later comments, Marie was not welcomed by the Eugenics Society. Indeed my research has discovered a letter written by her on 24 March 1934 complaining how she had been excluded from the centre of the Society. Reasons for Marie's exclusion may have included the personal influence of her first husband, Reginald Ruggles Gates. Ruggles had a number of friends within the Society who understandably disapproved of his treatment by Marie in her annulment of their marriage. In addition, medical members of the Society were suspicious of Marie's abrasive character and lack of medical qualifications and they threatened to leave if she was given more prominence. As seen in Chap. 10 Marie's presence was often regarded as divisive because she was constantly picking battles. Most importantly the leadership of the Eugenics Society also realised that Marie did not share the majority of their views.

After World War II it was felt politic for the Eugenics Society to adopt the name of the Galton Institute as a way of distancing itself from the tarnished word 'Eugenics'. The Galton Institute still continued to support learned meetings and in 1997 organised a conference and published an edited collection of essays on Marie Stopes, '*Eugenics and the English Birth Control Movement*' as a tribute to her.⁹

Eugenics as a doctrine was not monolithic. Professor David Redvaldsen, is amongst those scholars who argue that Eugenics was a body of thought which developed according to who embraced it.¹⁰ Eugenics was malleable and could easily be combined with many political ideologies. Indeed Professor Richard Cleminson perceptively comments that Eugenics had a chameleon-like ability to appear in different guises to attract supporters of different political persuasions.¹¹ He also convincingly argues that during the first half of the twentieth century Eugenics cannot be conceived as being independent from the social context, structures of thought and the political conditions of its time.¹²

Dr Lesley Hall also highlights the diversity of Eugenic views. At one end of the political spectrum Eugenics was intended to revert society to a

previously idyllic state and at the other end of the political spectrum Eugenics was seen to promise a brave new world.¹³ It was embraced by a range of thinkers. These ranged from right-wing ultra-conservative National Socialists in Germany to prominent left-wing figures in Britain such as the dramatist George Bernard Shaw and academic Mary Stocks. The latter were among Marie's close friends. Shaw enthused that there was now no reasonable excuse for refusing to face the fact that nothing but a Eugenic religion could save the present civilisation from the fate that has overtaken all previous civilisations. Other famous Eugenicians included H. G. Wells, Theodore Roosevelt and the American birth control pioneer Margaret Sanger.

Surprisingly, from the perspective of twenty-first century politics, groups of women and individuals, who are now universally respected, held Eugenic views. The politically left-leaning members of the Women's Co-operative Guild supported elements of the Eugenic programme as shown in their July 1931 Conference. They were reported by Marie in her 1931 *Birth Control News* as passing a resolution calling for compulsory sterilisation for people with serious mental or physical defects and holding the view that 'We must not be squeamish.' In 1931 the radical Labour MP Ellen Wilkinson voted in the House of Commons in favour of voluntary sterilisation and the next year spoke at a Eugenics Society Meeting.¹⁴ Similarly, in 1936 the National Association of Labour Women passed a resolution allowing for voluntary sterilisation.

Eugenicians developed the concepts of positive and negative Eugenics. Positive Eugenics referred to the encouragement of the 'fit' to provide at least the replacement rate of the human population and negative Eugenics discouraged procreation by the mentally or physically 'unfit'. There was common agreement amongst the Eugenicians that reproduction was not a private decision but should be influenced by social considerations. At the time of the Boer War, government research into the health of army recruits showed evidence of chronic ill-health and there were fears concerning the procreation of the unfit. Some Eugenicians advocated marriage regulation, segregation or even sterilisation of the unfit. The American birth control pioneer Margaret Sanger succinctly put the case for selective breeding: 'More children from the fit, less from the unfit.'¹⁵ It is negative Eugenics that has proved most controversial after the National Socialist ideology adopted in Adolf Hitler's Germany.

A central tenet of Eugenic beliefs on racial health and purity was the importance of motherhood which was considered to be the prime purpose

of a woman's existence. The Eugenicist Dr Saleeby enthused that the body of a woman was the temple of the life to come. Bearing and rearing children was shown to be the mother's chief mission and sacred duty to the Empire and the human race.¹⁶ A concern for Eugenicists was the fear that there was a growing disinclination for young women to marry or that they were becoming more selective in their choice of partners. Flippantly, socialites referred to potential marriage partners as VGTBW (very good to breed with).

At first Marie felt it politic to publicise her sympathy for Eugenic views. Her 1923 birth control organisation's full title was the Society for Constructive Birth Control and Racial Progress and the diaphragm used in her clinics was called 'the pro-race cap'. Her paper, *Birth Control News*, proclaimed on its front cover that it was 'a sure light against racial darkness' and advertised 'Constructive Birth Control Racial Soluables' on its back cover. Indeed the issue of racial purity was a theme running through all the editions of *Birth Control News*.

In her early books, given the then current intellectual climate, Marie does understandably employ Eugenic arguments to advance her work. In *Radiant Motherhood*, published in 1920, she devotes a chapter to discussing 'A New and Irradiated Race' and writes that 'society allows the diseased, the racially negligent, the thriftless, the careless, the feeble minded, the very lowest and worst members of the community to produce innumerable tens of stunted, warped and inferior infants'.¹⁷

However, Marie's thinking changed direction and she later became much more optimistic about the role birth control could play in the development of society. Marie, in a confidential interview in 1935 with a BBC official about birth control, is reported as making a statement which emphasised the positive importance of birth control measures. The official reported that Marie made a great point of the fact that contraception did not merely control, but was responsible for the production of much healthier children.¹⁸

Sterilisation was widely advocated by Eugenicists of all political persuasions including, as earlier noted, Labour women. Marie discusses the advantages of sterilisation in her early books but stresses that the 'power of the mother, consciously exerted in the voluntary procreation and joyous bearing of her children is the greatest power in the world'.¹⁹ In her later writings Marie modifies her views and goes on to stress the importance of accessible birth control which she believed would render sterilisation unnecessary. She did not advocate sterilisation in her birth control clinics

In her insightful article Dr Lesley Hall suggests that the common ground upon which ‘Eugenics, feminism and women in general could come close together was motherhood and child welfare.’ This is true but the concept of motherhood held very different interpretations for Marie and the traditional mainstream British Eugenicists.²⁰

Of Marie’s Eugenic gestures, two in particular, have attracted lasting notoriety. Firstly, Marie forbade her son to marry his fiancée because she was short-sighted. Secondly, just before the World War II Marie presented a volume of her poems to Adolf Hitler.

Marie’s most publicised Eugenic act was the refusal to attend the wedding of her only son because his fiancé, Mary Eyre Barnes Wallis, wore glasses. Marie claimed this was dysgenic and the condition would be passed onto their children. Myopia was indeed condemned in the Eugenics Society by the Socialist Eden Paul, but photographs show that Marie’s first husband wore spectacles, and this did not appear to disturb her. Marie was always selective about which aspects of Eugenics she followed and had earlier chosen to ignore Eugenics’ stress on racial purity by her close relationship with a Japanese professor.

Harry, Marie’s son, has argued that the real objection by his mother to her son’s fiancée was probably not her myopia but because Mary had not been personally selected by her as a suitable wife. This outweighed all other factors. Mary was attractive, had a delightful personality and was a highly intelligent graduate, even graduating from University College London, Marie’s former university. Mary was later awarded her own doctorate and came from impeccable academic stock being the daughter of Barnes Wallis, the eminent scientist and inventor of the World War II ‘bouncing bomb’. Initially Barnes Wallis had doubts about Harry’s progress in his academic career but the more Marie objected, the more Barnes Wallis supported the couple.

Harry and Mary both expressed their pleasure to me that, though he was late, Harry’s father Henry Roe had attended their wedding ceremony.²¹ Harry regretted his mothers’ action but he and Mary believed the Eugenic arguments were a smokescreen for Marie’s failure to control the selection of his spouse. In Harry’s childhood she was all-controlling.

Harry regarded the incident of Marie’s gift to Adolf Hitler as, rather than showing agreement with his policies, another instance of his mother’s megalomania. Marie believed she had the ability to stop wars and so presented to Hitler in 1939 a copy of her *Love Songs* together with a letter suggesting it be circulated to German youth who, she said, must learn to love.

Dear Herr Hitler

Love is the greatest thing in the world: so will you accept from me these [poems] that you may allow the young people of your nation to have them? The young must learn love from the particular 'till they are wise enough for the universal. I hope too that you yourself may find something to enjoy in the book.'²²

Marie was not the only person to try to be friends with Hitler as can be seen by other naive well-intentioned gestures. In 1939 the well-known artist Walter Sickert offered to give painting lessons to Hitler in the manner of his art lessons given to Winston Churchill. Also Hitler was not the only recipient of Marie's poems. Marie sent unsolicited poems to those she considered to be the great and the good. Those unlucky enough to be recipients included King George VI, George Bernard Shaw and Noel Coward.

Marie's writings should not always be taken at face value. For instance, in the University of Manchester Special Collections Library there is a 1941 pamphlet called *Black Breeding*. The title makes it appear to be a discussion on Eugenics but in fact it was nothing to do with the subject of race. It was written in reply to an article written in Lord Vansittart's *Black Record*.²³ Marie drew on her experience as a doctoral scholar in Munich to condemn Hitler and National Socialism. Typically, she wrote the article, putting her own actions at centre stage: 'Goose stepping soldiers had to go into the gutter as she would not move.'

Marie was certainly a Eugenicist but I agree with Professor Simon Szreter, University of Cambridge, that she was a maverick Eugenicist.²⁴ Deborah Cohen, in her contribution to the Galton Institute's Symposium on Marie Stopes, makes a crucial point concerning Marie's commitment to Eugenics. She argues that historians have made the error of assuming Marie's Eugenic beliefs were necessarily translated into Eugenic action and traces numerous examples of contradictions between Marie's theory and practice.²⁵

After studying her Clinic's case files Deborah Cohen correctly concludes that Marie subordinated her Eugenic and political beliefs to her over-riding concern for the individual woman's health and happiness. Marie was non-judgemental in her pregnancy counselling and against Eugenic principles gave advice to a mixed-race couples to help them conceive. Although she advocated an ideal family size of four children she was not opposed to couples having plentiful children: 'Babies in the right

places.’ Marie repeatedly stated she was not against large families, rather explaining that babies should be planned. ‘We advocate birth control in the interests of the mother, the father and the race. We are a pro-baby, pro-race organisation.’

Again Marie was at variance with the traditional view of Eugenicians regarding the role of upper-class and middle-class wives in producing children. The mainstream Eugenic view was that the race should be improved by the upper classes producing larger families and the lower classes restricting their breeding. However, Marie opposed this argument and maintained that it was the right of upper- and middle-class women to control their fertility and refused to tell mothers that they must ‘breed for Britain’. She writes that, ‘Her husband may be a millionaire but I shall still describe her as a poor woman if she did not know how to control her own motherhood and suffered from that want of knowledge.’²⁶ In a single day the wives of two school teachers and the wife of a film director were advised at the Constructive Birth Control (CBC) London clinic.

After the 1930s, Marie ceased to be heavily involved with the Eugenics Society but on her death in 1958 she did leave them her birth control clinic at Whitfield Street. This may be special pleading, but perhaps her action was less an endorsement of Eugenics than a determination to stop the clinic being taken over by the rival birth control organisation, the SPBCC, which she had fought all her life.

In conclusion, Marie was certainly a Eugenicist but a maverick Eugenicist who considered herself slighted by the Eugenic Society and distanced herself from them. She used Eugenic theories when convenient to her but did not allow these theories to influence her practical and personal actions. While other prominent women who embraced Eugenics in the 1920s are rightly admired, I argue that it is unfair that Eugenics is cited as a reason for Marie’s outstanding achievements not being acknowledged. There are self-perpetuating erroneous interpretations of Marie’s life which unfortunately do not do justice to her nuanced beliefs and work.

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Epilogue

Abstract At end of Marie's life she turned to writing and poetry with mixed critical acclaim. She rejected her husband Humphrey but in the last years of her life formed a relationship with Avro Manhattan, many years her junior.

Marie became increasingly isolated from family and friends, though she valued her grandchildren. She gradually withdrew from her earlier sexual political concerns and died in October 1958.

Marie was once considered old fashioned and irrelevant to the modern world. However, her legacy is now being appreciated by younger generations who regard her as a positive role model. Her achievements are being recognised by feminists in their relationship to the suffrage movement. This chapter concludes by making the case for Marie's legacy as a sexual revolutionary and birth control pioneer.

Keywords Marie's poetry • Deteriorating relationship with husband • Humphrey's death • Avro Manhattan • Marie's death • Importance as a role model • Marie's legacy

Remember my sweet youth and not my age. Remember me as I was young and fair. Marie Stopes, *Love Songs for Young Lovers*¹

The above quotation has added poignancy as Marie Stopes became increasingly isolated from family and friends, and her personal life contains echoes of a Greek tragedy. This chapter traces Marie's intellectual achievements as she concentrated on writing poetry, her personal relationships towards the end of her life, and her enduring legacy.

Marie had written fiction when working as an academic but in the last decades of her life increasingly turned to writing poetry, with varying degrees of success. After the publication of *Love Songs for Young Lovers* in 1939 (the volume she sent to Hitler), the playwright George Bernard Shaw extravagantly praised her poems: 'Your scientific background is interesting as it produces an impersonality that is new in love-poems and gives them an unusual dignity. You are a poet all right, it can't be helped.'² Shaw particularly praised her poem in this volume, 'We burn', with its scientific allusions:

We speak of fire
When Oxygen leaps swift
In fierce embrace of carbon,
Then the lift of heat flicks red-hot tongues
So fierce they heavenward aspire.³

Other of Marie's works were extremely personal, for instance her poem 'Absence' illustrates the desolation of abandonment:

By depriving me of joy
Have you given me wisdom
Strength to endure
Till tardy joy appears?⁴

However, the language of some her poems is too overblown for twenty-first century tastes, as in this sonnet to 'An unborn child' which has this beginning:

Spirit enmeshed in liquid tender gloom
Throbbing beneath my constant beating heart.⁵

One of Marie's less-pleasant traits was that she could be sycophantic to those, especially those in the literary world, whom she regarded as prestigious writers. As seen earlier in this book, she was flattered by Aylmer Maude, Tolstoy's biographer and later her own biographer. She also

cultivated playwright George Bernard Shaw and the Poet Laureate John Masfield, both of whom wrote prefaces to her poems. Marie also befriended Lord Alfred Douglas, well-known from his close friendship as a youth with Oscar Wilde. Lord Douglas was a Roman Catholic but he admired her work and Marie campaigned (unsuccessfully) to get him awarded a State pension.

Not every literary figure admired Marie's literary work. The popular dramatist Noel Coward resisted her overtures early as 1922. His sarcastic response can be seen in part of this poem in the British Library Archives:

If you have missed life's shining goal
And mixed with sex perverts and dopes
For normal soap to cleanse your soul
Apply to Marie Stopes

And if perhaps you fail all round
And lie among your shattered hopes
Just raise your body from the ground
And *crawl* to Marie Stopes.⁶

Marie's literary achievements provided her with respectability and distanced her from the controversy of the birth control campaigns. Before the war she had been shunned by the BBC as being too controversial but on 30 May 1956 she was interviewed by the BBC, near her Dorking home, for the radio programme *Women's Hour's* 'May Profile'.

However, Marie never divorced her academic scholarship from her poetry. Near the end of her life in 1953 she gave evidence to the Royal Commission on the Press and describes herself in these comprehensive terms: 'An academic scientist dealing with the structure and nature of coal; as an author of literary works which have a wide circulation; as the pioneer of one aspect of sociological reform which has an immensely important bearing on present problems; and as a Poet.'⁷ In her statement she proudly lists her qualifications as: 'DSc (London); PhD (Munich); FLS; FGS; FRS Lit., Academic Scientist and Researcher in Palaeontology, Founder and President of the Constructive Birth Control Society and Mothers' Clinics and Poet.'

Marie's relationships with her family deteriorated further. Humphrey who had financed and supported Marie's birth control ventures lost much of his wealth in the inter-war stock market crash and was not able to carry on generously financing her. The loving letters to the newly wed 'Tiger'

completely changed in tone and Ruth Hall describes the deterioration in their relationship as Humphrey was gradually cast aside in the 1930s.⁸ In July 1938, in a curious letter, which Ruth Hall thinks was probably dictated by Marie, he gave Marie permission to take lovers.⁹ Humphrey rejoined the Royal Airforce at the start of World War II and was given the rank of Pilot Officer but he was denied access to their house even when on leave. Humphrey was accused by his wife of being selfish by making extra housework for the servants but although he offered to undertake any extra cleaning work, Marie still would not allow him to come to their house. Marie did eventually visit Humphrey when he was ill but it was in the last week of his life. Humphrey died in 1949.

Marie was always pleased to see her grandchildren, and wrote in 1955 that Catherine must come for her birthday tea. However, her son Harry reflected that she was never fully reconciled with him and her daughter in-law. Harry showed remarkable generosity to his mother and reflected that she could display great sweetness and charm: 'My mother was difficult, not to say outrageous, but what she gave me was the inability to accept ordinariness.'¹⁰

Marie never seriously believed that she would grow old and probably believed the sexual philosophy she had outlined in her 1928 book *Enduring Passion*. This desire for eternal youth might be one reason why in 1952, at the age of seventy-two, she cultivated a relationship with the handsome Avro Manhattan who was over thirty-two years younger than her. Was it coincidence that 'Avro' was the name of her second husband's aircraft company?¹¹ The two are photographed together just after he had rescued her from the sea in Dorset, so earning her eternal gratitude. He made frequent visits to her home at Norbury Park and the couple spent time together at her Old Lighthouse in Dorset. She characteristically made Avro draft a will which left everything to her, but Avro was not to receive anything from her estate.

Eventually, Marie discovered that she had the symptoms of breast cancer and she died on 2 October 1958, having never admitted to the seriousness of her illness. Her lifelong friend Mary Stocks visited Marie at her home just before her death and found it a depressing experience when she discovered Marie living alone in a neglected house.¹² Marie kept her cancer a secret and even forbade her housekeeper to contact Harry, her son. Marie did not want him to see her in a weakened state. As Marie wrote in the sonnet at this chapter heading she wanted to be remembered as in her prime and not as a sick woman.¹³



Fig. 10.1 Avro Manhattan with Marie Stopes off Portland Island, Dorset, 1957

In her will, Marie pointedly left Norbury Park, not to her family but to the Royal Society of Literature. Other small bequests were made to her son Harry; not a generous monetary legacy, but her copy of the *Greater*

Oxford Dictionary. She bequeathed to her grandson Jonathan, the freehold of a small Richmond house, in trust. After Marie's death her ashes were scattered off Portland Bill by Harry, as she wished, with Mary and one of the grandchildren observing.¹⁴ As Marie would have wanted Avro also attended the ceremony. Mary found it a stressful occasion and realised it was even more so for Harry as he drove to Portland Bill.¹⁵

Marie's work left behind important legacies: in academic life, in sexual relations, the birth control movement and as a role model for the advancement of women.

Marie was a communicator, and her original passion was for palaeobotany. Her research is still recognised as important, even though palaeobotany no longer holds a central place in the biology discipline. Her discovery of evidence of the earliest flowering plants stood for many decades and was only superseded in the late twentieth century. Marie's *Cretaceous Plant Catalogue* became the standard reference work in palaeobotany. Her research on coal was valuable academically and to the World War I campaign. She identified four ingredients of coal, which she named as vitrain, clairan, durain and fusain. Marie's legacy as a palaeobotanist can



Fig. 10.2 Stopes-Roe family group in Christmas 2010. *Centre* Harry and Mary Stopes-Roe and their children: Jonathan, Catherine, Helena and Christopher

be seen in the popular Portland Island Museum, Dorset, which she founded and where the members still celebrate Marie's birthday every year. Many of her specimens, many locally collected, are also curated in the University of Manchester Museum.

The influence of Marie's work in changing sexual attitudes is now widely recognised. In 2006 the writer and broadcaster Lord Melvyn Bragg chose Marie's *Married Love* in his selection of books for the television series *12 Books that Changed the World*. In the accompanying book to the series, he recognised Marie's far-reaching influence on women's right 'to control and enjoy their sex and family lives'.¹⁶ Marie would have been delighted that her book featured alongside *Magna Carta* and Darwin's *Origin of the Specie* as life-changing works in Bragg's television series. One legacy of Marie's pioneering work on sexual relations, as 'agony aunt' can be seen in the personal advice columns that are published every week in numerous newspapers and magazines.

Marie would doubtless also have been delighted by the way her most important legacy, the birth control movement, continues to develop. Just as suffragists are rightly commemorated for obtaining the vote for women, it is now recognised that women's control of their bodies is liberating. Marie campaigned for women of all social classes to have access to contraception. Unfortunately birth control Memorandum 153/W presented to the Cabinet in 1930 was not the triumph that Marie believed. In practice it had the opposite effect from that which she had intended because it enabled local authorities to delay taking action on the issue of birth control. However, in the 1970s with the advent of the contraceptive pill and IUD (coil), the Labour Health Minister, Barbara Castle, included family planning as part of her social policy. In the House of Commons on 28 March 1974, Barbara Castle announced that 'from 1 April 1974, family planning will be open at National Health Service clinics to all who ask for it, irrespective of age or marital status...We have decided that it would be wrong to impose prescription charges for family planning obtained from NHS Clinics and Hospitals.' In her autobiography, Barbara surprisingly underestimates the significance of this decision which allowed women to take charge of their fertility, something women had been campaigning about for over forty years.¹⁷ The new birth control clinics were efficient and cheap but they lacked the idiosyncrasies of Marie's vases of flowers and portraits of cherubic babies.

Marie's birth control clinic had to close in the 1970s due to financial difficulties but a year later a comprehensive organisation was founded

using Marie's name in its title as a tribute to her pioneering work. Marie Stopes International (MSI) provides facilities for sexual and reproductive health. Since 1978, when it began its work overseas, MSI now works in over forty countries and has 452 clinics world-wide with offices in London, Brussels, Melbourne and the United States. Their advice is much more comprehensive than that which could be offered by the CBC, with abortion counselling included as a choice.

Although she was not militantly involved in the suffrage struggle, Marie serves as a role model for later generations of feminists. Marie would not accept restrictions in the academic world with regard to her sex and as an undergraduate and post-graduate student, and post-doctoral researcher, she was able to achieve more academically than most men. Her significance as its first female academic is acknowledged by the University of Manchester in its current literature on social responsibility, 'We make a difference'. Her proven success as a female lecturer cleared the way for other women to follow. She showed a female could successfully lead complicated overseas research expeditions. The twenty-first century feminist archaeological group, Trowel Blazers, acknowledges Marie Stopes as being an extraordinary early 'trowel blazer' and features her achievements on their Twitter and Facebook pages. Marie's importance as a sexual pioneer is now being celebrated by young feminists on occasions such as International Women's Day.¹⁸

Marie Stopes was a Modernist. The new Alan Gilbert Learning Commons at the University of Manchester has a quotation from Marie in pride of place in the entrance hall which encapsulates Marie's thinking: 'We are surrounded in this world by processes and transmutations so amazing that were they not taking place around us hourly they would be scouted as impossible imaginings.' The source is not given so most readers would assume this quotation was drawn from Marie's distinguished career as an academic scientist at the University. In fact, the words are taken from the concluding chapter of *Married Love* and encapsulate both her scientific and humanist philosophy.¹⁹

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APPENDIX A

PEN PORTRAITS OF MARIE STOPES' FRIENDS

A selection of Marie's Stopes' friends and acquaintances is detailed below with references as to how their lives can be followed up. Significantly, many of these women had been involved with the suffrage campaign before they became involved with the birth control issue.

Mrs Charis Ursula Frankenburg (1892–1985)

Charis Frankenburg (née Barnett) was helped by Marie Stopes to found one of the country's first birth control clinics outside London, though this remained separate from Marie's own birth control organisation, Constructive Birth Control and Racial Progress. Charis remembered going with her mother, as a young girl, to listen to Mrs Pankhurst speaking in Manchester on the campaign for women's suffrage.

Charis Frankenburg won a scholarship to the prestigious St Paul's Girls' School in London. She did well academically and then studied at Somerville College, Oxford. She continued with her Latin studies and Harry Stopes-Roe told me how much he enjoyed, as a schoolboy, reading Charis' popular primer *Latin with Laughter*. While at Oxford she enjoyed the social life and became friendly with novelist Dorothy Sayers and the pacifist feminist writer Vera Brittain who describes Charis as 'potentially interesting' in her later memoir *The Testament of Youth*.

When World War I started, Charis realised its seriousness. She left Oxford to undertake emergency training as a midwife so that she could serve as a nurse in France. She went to Clapham Maternity Hospital where she qualified as a Certified Midwife. In 1915, Charis started work at Chalons-sur-Marne Maternity Hospital in France where she gained valuable experience and afterwards was awarded the Médaille Commémorative de la Grande Guerre. Charis was unusual amongst voluntary birth controllers in that she possessed medical qualifications in midwifery.

On her return to England Charis married her Jewish cousin, Sydney Frankenburg, with whom she had four perfectly spaced children. She retained her interest in maternal health, writing books and articles on the subject including *Commonsense in the Nursery*. Charis became a member of the local Maternal Mortality Committee, and amongst other cases, investigated the case of a young Jewish mother who died from alleged hospital negligence.

In the Autumn of 1925 Charis wrote to Marie, who by now had a national reputation, requesting help finding possible birth control enthusiasts in her area. As a result she was put in touch with Mary Stocks and became, with her, the co-founder of the Manchester, Salford and District Mother's Clinic. Charis was given the title of Secretary but was active in all aspects of the clinic's work. It was Charis who found premises for the clinic and organised its publicity. She was a committed volunteer and formed good relationships with the women attending the clinic, including one who her husband had many years before dismissed from his factory. Charis networked assiduously and was a member of the Salford Women Citizens Association and later the National Council of Women.

Charis' organisational ability was apparent in the founding of other birth control clinics in Wolverhampton and Liverpool. She then sat on the newly formed Co-ordinating Committee of the National Society for the Provision of Birth Control Clinics and its successor the National Birth Control Council. Charis continued to give talks on birth control when in her seventies and for many years served as a JP.

Charis moved away from the North but her achievements were remembered there. In 1973 Charis was given the Freedom of the City of Salford for 'services in the field of health and social welfare', only the first woman to be awarded this, and joins L.S. Lowry and Nelson Mandela in being so honoured.

Charis and Sydney had four children: Peter, John, Miles and Ursula.

Archive

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Nurse Maude Florence Hebbes

Maude Hebbes qualified as a midwife in 1908 and was appointed by Marie Stopes as Nurse in Charge of Marie's first birth control clinic in Marlborough Road, Holloway, London. Marie always maintained a positive relationship with Maude, in contrast to others in the medical profession.

Maude was active in the suffrage campaign and through her nursing experience she was able to help women who were injured in the violent demonstrations for the right to vote. Sylvia Pankhurst, although a founding member of the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU) broke away from it to form her own Federation based in the East End of London. Maude came to know Sylvia well and is featured in her autobiography. Sylvia describes how Nurse Hebbes provided a disguise for her by lending her a nurse's uniform so she could escape the attentions of the police.

Sylvia Pankhurst later went on to open four mother and baby clinics and Maude took charge of one of these, the Mothers' Arms, and stayed there from 1914 to 1921 when it closed due to lack of funds. She supported the severely malnourished infants in the East End who were suffering from food shortages in World War I. In 1915 she was photographed in the Women's Hall nursing an underweight baby who had gaunt features. Dr Johnson later wrote in a testimonial that Nurse Hebbes was 'never sparing of herself in endeavouring to ameliorate their condition'. Maude, on a personal level, also related well to the children making them laugh and romp around.

Marie Stopes interviewed Maude Hebbes for her position at the Society of Constructive Birth Control's innovative new clinic. Maude at the interview reportedly told Marie that she had read both of her books, *Married Love* and *Wise Parenthood*, which she greatly admired. Maude had a central role in the Mothers' Clinic as it was she who took a personal history from the woman, carried out a vaginal examination, fitted the woman with a pessary and gave her clear instructions for its use. In difficult cases she could refer women to the clinic's doctor, Dr Jane Hawthorne.

The important role of Nurse Hebbes was shown in Marie Stopes 1923 libel proceedings taken out against Dr Halliday Sutherland in the High Court. Nurse Hebbes was questioned by Mr Patrick Hastings, Marie's defence counsel. After outlining her qualifications, Nurse Hebbes gave details of the records she kept. She supported Marie's evidence by denying any experimentation on the poor which was the crux of Halliday's case.

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Lady Constance Lytton (1869–1923)

Lady Constance Lytton came to know Marie Stopes in the last years of her life.

Lady Lytton came from a highly privileged family, her father being a Viceroy to India and her mother a lady in waiting to Queen Victoria. The first forty years of her life were highly conventional when she carried out the family duties expected of an upper-class daughter. However, a chance encounter with suffragettes on 8 September 1906 completely transformed Lady Lytton's life. She went to witness the trial of Emmeline and Christabel Pankhurst, leaders of the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU) who were campaigning for the vote. Lady Lytton was particularly impressed with Mrs Emmeline Pankhurst and soon became convinced of the rightness of their suffrage cause. She therefore moved out

of her comfortable family background and joined the WSPU in 1909 becoming part of the network of suffragettes.

In spite of having delicate health all of her life, Lady Lytton carried out physical acts of violence to promote the WSPU cause. She started her campaign in 1909 by throwing a stone at government minister Lloyd George's car, later joining in window-smashing with other suffragettes and fighting with police.

Lady Lytton was imprisoned four times, twice in Holloway Prison, London. However, Lady Lytton came to realise that she was being accorded special treatment by the authorities because of her aristocratic status. She therefore cut her hair, wore spectacles and ugly clothes, and took on the identity of Jane Warton, a poor working-class woman. When arrested in Liverpool she was brutally force-fed eight times before her identity was discovered and she was released. This creating widespread publicity for the WSPU, including questions in the House of Commons, and caused an outcry about the harsh treatment of suffragettes. Lady Lytton was popularly regarded as a martyr for the cause.

After World War I, Marie Stopes sought out Lady Lytton to be a vice-president of her newly formed Society for Constructive Birth Control and Racial Progress. Their correspondence shows a genuine warmth in the developing relationship between the two women and she subsequently visited Marie at her clinic.

Archive

British Library. Correspondence of Constance Lytton to Marie Stopes 1921–1923. Add MSS 58688 and following.

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Mrs Elsie Plant (1890–1982)

Elsie Plant (née Furlong), lived in Greater Manchester all her life and became friendly with Marie Stopes over a period of years.

Elsie rebelled against her father's Conservative political views and became a suffragette. She joined the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU) and, as well as going on the mass suffragette marches, met Mrs Emmeline Pankhurst.

Elsie married William Plant who was a skilled hat block maker. Coincidentally I visited William in his hat block-making workshop just before his retirement. William's equipment, including lathes and workbenches, was then donated, on his death, to Stockport's Hat Works Museum where it is now in a major exhibit. Also included in the exhibition is a reconstruction of his office where Elsie used to work on the firm's ledgers. Elsie had been a secretary and bookkeeper prior to her marriage.

Elsie and Walter became involved in the Labour Party Fellowship in Stockport. They organised visiting lectures by national figures such as Tom Mann speaking on the General Strike of 1923 and later Ben Tillett MP of the Dockers' Union. Elsie contacted Marie Stopes who spoke in Stockport in 1923 and she organised Marie's speaking engagements in subsequent years. Elsie was in a good position to form an astute assessment of Marie's difficult character.

Elsie and William's birth control campaign did not have the support of the local Labour Party because the leadership there was afraid it would lose them Roman Catholic votes. Elsie persevered and after World War II formed the Stockport Family Planning Association (FPA) in which she served as Treasurer. The FPA was eventually successful in winning a victory in the local council which in 1955 gave the FPA use of municipal premises and eventually provided a purpose-built clinic.

Elsie and William had three children, all planned, but Elsie said they did not use Marie Stopes' methods. Her daughter Aileen donated her mother's papers to the Stockport Local History Archive.

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Exhibition

Hat Works Museum, Ground level: William Plant's Office & Block Making Machinery Wellington Mill, Wellington Road South, Stockport SK3 0EU.

Mrs Mary Danvers Stocks JP, Later Baroness (1891–1975)

Mary Stocks (née Brinton) was a life-long friend of Marie Stopes, their two families holidayed together at Marie's house in Dorset and Mary often visited Marie, doing so only weeks before her death. Mary Stocks was amused that because of similarities in their names she was often mistaken for Marie Stopes by broadcasters and the general public.

Mary always considered herself a feminist. Although only sixteen she joined Millicent Fawcett's non-militant National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies (NUWSS) and took an active part in their campaign for the franchise. Mrs Fawcett was eventually to be godmother to Mary's first child. Mary was also active in the NUWSS's successor, the National Union of Societies for Equal Citizenship (NUSEC), when Eleanor Rathbone took over as Chairman from Millicent Fawcett. Mary became joint editor of the NUSEC paper the *Woman's Leader* and wrote a campaigning booklet for NUSEC in favour of birth control provision, *Family Limitation and Women's Organisations*.

Mary attended St Paul's Girls' School in London. She had a brilliant academic career, studying at the London School of Economic (LSE) and graduating with a first class honours degree in Economics. In 1913 she married the philosopher John Leofric Stocks and joined him in Oxford where he was a Fellow of St John's College. During World War I, while her husband was serving with distinction in the army in France, Mary taught undergraduates at the LSE and King's College London. After the war, living in Oxford again, she taught Economic History at Somerville College and Lady Margaret Hall.

Mary found the academic atmosphere of Oxford restrictive compared to the LSE, but it was in Oxford that she first met Marie Stopes, soon after the publication of Marie's *Married Love*. This was the start of their lasting friendship.

Mary moved to Manchester in 1924 when her husband was appointed Professor of Philosophy at the University. She then received a letter from Marie who had received a request from Charis Frankenburg about starting a birth control clinic there. Marie put Mary in contact with Charis who Mary recognised as a former school friend. They co-founded the Manchester and Salford Mothers' Clinic which proved highly successful.

Mary served as a magistrate in Manchester from 1930 to 1936. She carried on with her teaching at the University Settlement in Every Street, Ancoats.

In *My Commonplace Book*, Mary describes the happy times the Stopes and Stocks families spent together, although her own children were sometimes shocked by Marie's extrovert behaviour.

Mary's career followed that of her academic husband John Stocks. After living in Oxford and Manchester, Mary moved to Liverpool where her husband was Vice-Chancellor of Liverpool University. When he suddenly died in 1937 Mary moved back to London becoming Principal of Westfield College until her retirement in 1951.

Mary was politically active in her adult life. In 1946 she unsuccessfully contested as an Independent, her friend Eleanor Rathbone's parliamentary constituency, which became vacant on Eleanor's death. In 1966 Mary Stocks was created a Life Peer as Baroness Stocks of the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea. Initially she took the Labour Party whip but became a cross-bencher in 1974. She became a popular broadcaster as well as continuing with her writing, of which a selection is given below,

Mary and John had one son and two daughters.

Archives

Mary ordered all her papers to be destroyed on her death but see reports including Manchester and District Mothers' Clinic Annual Report 1926–1927.

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